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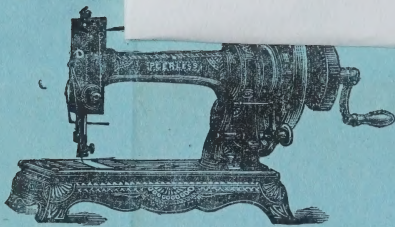
ADELA CATHCART

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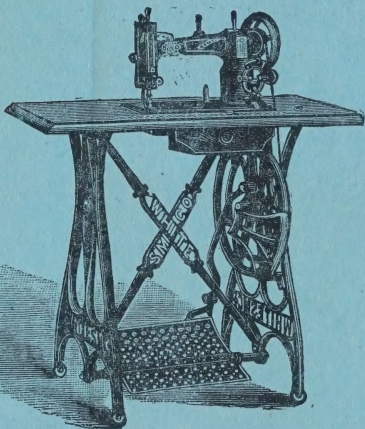
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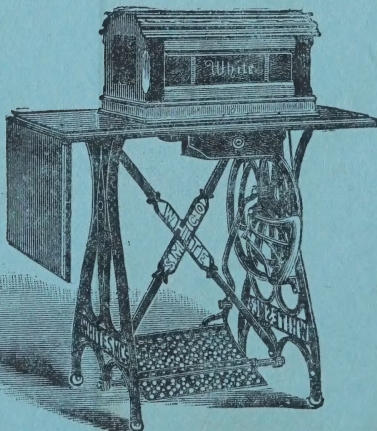
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ADELA CATHCART.

BY

GEORGE MAC DONALD, LL.D.

AUTHOR OF "WITHIN AND WITHOUT," "DAVID ELGINBROD,"
"MALCOLM," ETC., ETC.

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ADELA CATHCART

CHAPTER I.

CHRISTMAS EVE.

It was the afternoon of Christmas Eve, sinking towards the night. All day long the wintry light had been diluted with fog, and now the vanguard of the darkness coming to aid the mist, the dying day was well-nigh smothered between them. When I looked through the window, it was into a vague and dim solidification of space, a mysterious region in which awful things might be going on, and out of which anything might come ; but out of which nothing came in the meantime, except small sparkles of snow, or rather ice, which as we swept rapidly onwards, and the darkness deepened, struck faster and faster against the weather-windows. For we, that is, myself and a fellow-passenger, of whom I knew nothing yet but the waistcoat and neckcloth, having caught a glimpse of them as he searched for an obstinate railway-ticket, were in a railway-carriage, darting along, at an all but frightful rate, northwards from London.

Being the sole occupants of the carriage, we had made the most of it, like Englishmen, by taking seats diagonally opposite to each other, laying our heads in the corners, and trying to go to sleep. But for me it was of no use to try longer. Not

that I had anything particular on my mind or spirits; but a man cannot always go to sleep at spare moments. If any one can, let him consider it a great gift, and make good use of it accordingly; that is, by going to sleep on every such opportunity.

As I, however, could not sleep, much as I should have enjoyed it, I proceeded to occupy my very spare time with building up what I may call a conjectural mould, into which the face, dress, carriage, &c., of my companion would fit. I had already discovered that he was a clergyman; but this added to my difficulties in constructing the said mould. For, theoretically, I had a great dislike to clergymen; having, hitherto, always found that the *clergy* absorbed the *man*; and that the *cloth*, as they called it even themselves, would be no bad epithet for the individual, as well as the class. For all clergymen whom I had yet met, regarded mankind and their interests solely from the clerical point of view, seeming far more desirous that a man should be a good churchman, as they called it, than that he should love God. Hence, there was always an indescribable and, to me, unpleasant odour of their profession about them. If they knew more concerning the *life* of the world than other men, why should everything they said remind one of mustiness and mildew? In a word, why were they not men at worst, when at best they ought to be more of men than other men? And here lay the difficulty: by no effort could I get the face before me to fit into the clerical mould which I had all ready in my own mind for it. That was, at all events, the face of a man, in spite of waistcoat and depilation. I was not even surprised when, all at once, he sat upright in his seat, and asked me if I would join him in a cigar. I gladly consented. And here let me state a fact, which added then to my interest in my fellow-passenger, and will serve now to excuse the enormity of smoking in a railway carriage. We

were going to the same place—we must be ; and nobody would enter that carriage to-night, but the man who had to clean it. For, although we were shooting along at a terrible rate, the train would not stop to set us down, but would cast us loose a mile from our station ; and some minutes after it had shot by like an infernal comet of darkness, our carriage would trot gently up to the platform, for it had come from London all on its own hook—and thought nothing of it.

We were a long way yet, however, from our destination. The night grew darker and colder, and after the necessary unmuffling occasioned by the cigar process, we drew our wraps closer about us, leaned back in our corners, and smoked away in silence ; the red glow of our cigars serving to light the carriage nearly as well as the red nose of the neglected and half-extinguished lamp. For we were in a second-class carriage, a fact for which I leave the clergyman to apologize : it is nothing to me, for I am nobody.

But, after all, I fear I am unjust to the railway company, for there was light enough for me to see, and in some measure scrutinize, the face of my fellow-passenger. I could discern a strong chin, and good, useful jaws ; with a firm-lipped mouth, and a nose more remarkable for quantity than disposition of mass, being rather low, and very thick. It was surmounted by two brilliant, kindly, black eyes. I lay in wait for his forehead, as if I had been a hunter, and he some peculiar animal that wanted killing right in the middle of it. But it was some time before I was gratified with a sight of it. I did see it, however, and I *was* gratified. For when he wanted to throw away the end of his cigar, finding his window immovable (the frosty wind that bore the snow-flakes blowing from that side), and seeing that I opened mine to accommodate him, he moved across, and, in so doing, knocked his hat against the roof. As he displaced, to replace it, I had my opportunity

It was a splendid forehead for size every way, but chiefly for breadth. A kind of rugged calm rested upon it—a suggestion of slumbering power, which it delighted me to contemplate. I felt that that was the sort of man to make a friend of, if one had the good luck to be able. But I did not yet make any advance towards further acquaintance.

My reader may, however, be desirous of knowing what kind of person is making so much use of the pronoun *I*. He may have the same curiosity to know his fellow-traveller over the region of these pages, that I had to see the forehead of the clergyman. I can at least prevent any further inconvenience from this possible curiosity, by telling him enough to destroy his interest in me.

I am an —— ; well, I suppose I *am* an old bachelor ; not very far from fifty, in fact ; old enough, at all events, to be able to take pleasure in watching without sharing ; yet ready, notwithstanding, when occasion offers, to take a necessary part in what may be going on. I am able, as it were, to sit quietly alone, and look down upon life from a second-floor window, delighting myself with my own speculations, and weaving the various threads I gather, into webs of varying kind and quality. Yet, as I have already said in another form, I am not the last to rush downstairs and into the street, upon occasion of an accident or a row in it, or a conflagration next door. I may just mention, too, that having many years ago formed the Swedenborgian resolution of never growing old, I am as yet able to flatter myself that I am likely to keep it.

In proof of this, if further garrulity about myself can be pardoned, I may state that every year, as Christmas approaches, I begin to grow young again. At least I judge so from the fact that a strange, mysterious pleasure, well known to me by this time, though little understood and very varied, begins to glow in my mind with the first hint, come from what quarter it

may, whether from the church service, or a bookseller's window, that the day of all the year is at hand—is climbing up from the nether-world. I enjoy it like a child. I buy the Christmas number of every periodical I can lay my hands on, especially those that have pictures in them ; and although I am not very fond of plum-pudding, I anticipate with satisfaction the roast beef and the old port that ought always to accompany it. And above all things, I delight in listening to stories, and sometimes in telling them.

It amuses me to find what a welcome nobody I am amongst young people ; for they think I take no heed of them, and don't know what they are doing ; when, all the time, I even know what they are thinking. They would wonder to know how often I feel exactly as they do ; only I think the feeling is a more earnest and beautiful thing to me than it can be to them yet. If I see a child crowing in his mother's arms, I seem to myself to remember making precisely the same noise in my mother's arms. If I see a youth and a maiden looking into each other's eyes, I know what it means perhaps better than they do. But I say nothing. I do not even smile ; for my face is puckered, and I have a weakness about the eyes. But all this will be proof enough that I have not grown very old, in any bad and to-be-avoided sense, at least.

And now all the glow of the Christmas-time was at its height in my heart. For I was going to spend the day, and a few weeks besides, with a very old friend of mine, who lived near the town at which we were about to arrive like a post-script.—Where could my companion be going ? I wanted to know, because I hoped to meet him again somehow or other.

I ought to have told you, kind reader, that my name is Smith—actually *John* Smith ; but I'm none the worse for that ; and as I do not want to be distinguished much from other people, I do not feel it a hardship.

But where was my companion going? It could not be to my friend's, else I should have known something about him. It could hardly be to the clergyman's, because the vicarage was small, and there was a new curate coming with his wife, whom it would probably have to accommodate until their own house was ready. It could not be to the lawyer's on the hill, because there all were from home on a visit to their relations. It might be to Squire Vernon's, but he was the last man likely to ask a clergyman to visit him; nor would a clergyman be likely to find himself comfortable with the swearing old fox-hunter. The question must, then, for the present, remain unsettled. So I left it, and, looking out of the window once more, buried myself in Christmas fancies.

It was now dark. We were the under half of the world. The sun was scorching and glowing on the other side, leaving us to night and frost. But the night and the frost wake the sunshine of a higher world in our hearts; and who cares for winter weather at Christmas?—I believe in the proximate correctness of the date of our Saviour's birth. I believe he always comes in winter. And then let Winter reign without: Love is king within; and Love is lord of the winter.

How the happy fires were glowing everywhere! We shot past many a lighted cottage, and now and then a brilliant mansion. Inside both were hearts like our own, and faces like ours, with the red coming out on them, the red of joy, because it was Christmas. And most of them had some little feast in preparation. Is it vulgar, this feasting at Christmas? No. It is the Christmas feast that justifies all feasts, as the bread and wine of the Communion are the essence of all bread and wine, of all strength and rejoicing. If the Christianity of eating is lost—I will not say *forgotten*—the true type of eating is to be found at the dinner-hour in the Zoological Gardens. Certain I am, that but for the love which, ever revealing itself, came

out brightest at that first Christmas time, there would be no feasting—nay, no smiling; no world to go careering in joy about its central fire; no men and women upon it, to look up and rejoice.

“But you always look on the bright side of things.”

No one spoke aloud; I heard the objection in my mind. Could it come from the mind of my friend—for so I already counted him—opposite to me? There was no need for that supposition—I had heard the objection too often in my ears. And now I answered it in set, though unspoken form.

“Yes,” I said, “I do; for I keep in the light as much as I can. Let the old heathens count Darkness the womb of all things. I count Light the older, from the tread of whose feet fell the first shadow—and that was Darkness. Darkness exists but by the light, and for the light.”

“But that is all mysticism. Look about you. The dark places of the earth are the habitations of cruelty. Men and women blaspheme God and die. How can this then be an hour for rejoicing?”

“They are in God’s hands. Take from me my rejoicing, and I am powerless to help them. It shall not destroy the whole bright holiday to me, that my father has given my brother a beating. It will do him good. He needed it somehow. He is looking after them.”

Could I have spoken some of these words aloud? For the eyes of the clergyman were fixed upon me from his corner, as if he were trying to put off his curiosity with the sop of a probable conjecture about me.

“I fear he would think me a heathen,” I said to myself. “But if ever there was humanity in a countenance, there it is.”

It grew more and more pleasant to think of the bright fire and the cheerful room that awaited me. Nor was the idea of the table, perhaps already beginning to glitter with crystal

and silver, altogether uninteresting to me. For I was growing hungry.

But the speed at which we were now going was quite comforting. I dropped into a reverie. I was roused from it by the sudden ceasing of the fierce oscillation, which had for some time been threatening to make a jelly of us. We were loose. In three minutes more we should be at Purleybridge.

And in three minutes more we were at Purleybridge—the only passengers but one who arrived at the station that night. A servant was waiting for me, and I followed him through the booking office to the carriage destined to bear me to the Swanspond, as my friend Colonel Cathcart's house was called.

As I stepped into the carriage, I saw the clergyman walk by, with his carpet-bag in his hand.

Now I knew Colonel Cathcart intimately enough to offer the use of his carriage to my late companion; but at the moment I was about to address him, the third passenger, of whom I had taken no particular notice, came between us, and followed me into the carriage. This occasioned a certain hesitation, with which I am only too easily affected; the footman shut the door; I caught one glimpse of the clergyman turning the corner of the station into a field-path; the horses made a scramble; and away I rode to the Swanspond, feeling as selfish as ten Pharisees. It is true, I had not spoken a word to him beyond accepting his invitation to smoke with him; and yet I felt almost sure that we should meet again, and that when we did, we should both be glad of it. And now he was carrying a carpet-bag, and I was seated in a carriage and pair!

It was far too dark for me to see what my new companion was like; but when the light from the colonel's hall-door flashed upon us as we drew up, I saw that he was a young man, with a certain expression in his face which a first glance might have taken for fearlessness and power of some sort, but which not-

withstanding, I felt to be rather repellent than otherwise. The moment the carriage-door was opened, he called the servant by his name, saying,—

“When the cart comes with the luggage, send mine up directly. Take that now.”

And he handed him his dressing-bag.

He spoke in a self-approving tone, and with a drawl which I will not attempt to imitate, because I find all such imitation tends to caricature; and I want to be believed. Besides, I find the production of caricature has unfailingly a bad moral reaction upon myself. I daresay it is not so with others, but with that I have nothing to do: it is one of my weaknesses.

My worthy old friend, the colonel, met us in the hall—straight, broad-shouldered, and tall, with a severe military expression underlying the genuine hospitality of his countenance, as if he could not get rid of a sense of duty even when doing what he liked best. The door of the dining-room was partly open, and from it came the red glow of a splendid fire, the chink of encountering glass and metal, and, best of all, the pop of a cork.

“Would you like to go upstairs, Smith, or will you have a glass of wine first?—How do you do, Percy?”

“Thank you; I’ll go to my room at once,” I said.

“You’ll find a fire there, I know. Having no regiment now, I look after my servants. Mind you make use of them. I can’t find enough of work for them.”

He left me, and again addressed the youth, who had by this time got out of his great-coat, and, cold as it was, stood looking at his hands by the hall-lamp. As I moved away, I heard him say in a careless tone,—

“And how’s Adela, uncle?”

The reply did not reach me, but I knew now who the young fel’ow was.

Hearing a kind of human grunt behind me, I turned and saw that I was followed by the butler ; and, by a kind of intuition, I knew that this grunt was a remark, an inarticulate one, true, but not the less to the point on that account. I knew that he had been in the dining-room by the pop I had heard ; and I knew by the grunt that he had heard his master's observation about his servants.

"Come, Beeves," I said, "I don't want your help. You've got plenty to do, you know, at dinner-time ; and your master is rather hard upon you—isn't he ?"

I knew the man, of course.

"Well, Mr. Smith, master is the best master in the country, he is. But he don't know what work is, he don't."

"Well, go to your work, and never mind me. I know every turn in the house as well as yourself, Beeves."

"No, Mr. Smith ; I'll attend to you, if you please. Mr. Percy will take care of his-self. There's no fear of him. But you're my business. You are sure to give a man a kind word who does his best to please you."

"Why, Beeves, I think that is the least a man can do."

"It's the most, too, sir ; and some people think it's too much."

I saw that the man was hurt, and sought to soothe him.

"You and I are old friends, at least, Beeves."

"Yes, Mr. Smith. Money won't do't, sir. My master gives good wages, and I'm quite independing of visitors. But when a gentleman says to me, 'Beeves, I'm obliged to you,' why then, Mr. Smith, you feels at one and the same time, that he's a gentleman, and that you ain't a boot-jack or a coal-scuttle. It's the sentiman, Mr. Smith. If he despises us, why, we despises him. And we don't like waiting on a gentleman as ain't a gentleman. Ring the bell, Mr. Smith, when you want any-think, and I'll attend to you."

He had been twenty years in the colonel's service. He was not an old soldier, yet had a thorough *esprit de corps*, looking upon service as an honourable profession. In this he was not only right, but had a vast advantage over everybody whose profession is not sufficiently honourable for his ambition. All such must feel degraded. Beeves was fifty; and, happily for his opinion of his profession, had never been to London.

And the colonel was the best of masters; for because he ruled well, every word of kindness told. It is with servants as with children and with horses—it is of no use caressing them unless they know that you mean them to go.

When the dinner-bell rang, I proceeded to the drawing-room. The colonel was there, and I thought for a moment that he was alone. But I soon saw that a couch by the fire was occupied by his daughter, the Adela after whose health I had heard young Percy Cathcart inquiring. She was our hostess, for Mrs. Cathcart had been dead for many years, and Adela was her only child. I approached to pay my respects, but as soon as I got near enough to see her face, I turned involuntarily to her father, and said,—

“Cathcart, you never told me of this!”

He made me no reply; but I saw the long, stern upper lip twitching convulsively. I turned again to Adela, who tried to smile—with precisely the effect of a momentary gleam of sunshine upon a cold, leafless, and wet landscape.

“Adela, my dear, what is the matter?”

“I don't know, uncle.”

She had called me uncle since ever she had begun to speak, which must have been nearly twenty years ago.

I stood and looked at her. Her face was pale and thin, and her eyes were large, and yet sleepy. I may say at once that she had dark eyes and a sweet face; and that is all the description I mean to give of her. I had been accustomed to

see that face, if not rosy, yet plump and healthy; and those eyes with plenty of light for themselves, and some to spare for other people. But it was neither her wan look nor her dull eyes that distressed me: it was the expression of her face. It was very sad to look at; but it was not so much sadness as utter and careless hopelessness that it expressed.

"Have you any pain, Adela?" I asked.

"No," she answered.

"But you feel ill?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"I don't know."

And as she spoke, she tapped with one finger on the edge of the *couvre-pied* which was thrown over her, and gave a sigh as if her very heart was weary of everything.

"Shall you come down to dinner with us?"

"Yes, uncle; I suppose I must."

"If you would rather have your dinner sent up, my love—" began her father.

"Oh! no. It is all the same to me. I may as well go down."

My young companion of the carriage now entered, got up expensively. He, too, looked shocked when he saw her.

"Why, Addie!" he said.

But she received him with perfect indifference, just lifting one cold hand towards his, and then letting it fall again where it had lain before. Percy looked a little mortified; in fact, more mortified now than sorry; turned away, and stared at the fire.

Every time I open my mouth in a drawing-room before dinner, I am aware of an amount of self-denial worthy of a forlorn hope. Yet the silence was so awkward now, that I felt I must make an effort to say something; and the more original

the remark, the better I felt it would be for us all. But, with the best intentions, all I could effect was to turn towards Mr. Percy and say,—

“Rather cold for travelling, is it not?”

“Those foot-warmers are capital things, though,” he answered. “Mine was jolly hot. Might have roasted a potato on it, by Jove!”

“I came in a second-class carriage,” I replied; “and they are too cold to need a foot-warmer.”

He gave a shrug with his shoulders, as if he had suddenly found himself in low company, and must make the best of it. But he offered no further remark.

Beeves announced dinner.

“Will you take Adela, Mr. Smith?” said the colonel.

“I think I won’t go, after all, papa, if you don’t mind. I don’t want any dinner.”

“Very well, my dear,” began her father, but could not help showing his distress; perceiving which, Adela rose instantly from her couch, put her arm in his, and led the way to the dining-room. Percy and I followed.

“What can be the matter with the girl?” thought I. “She used to be merry enough. Some love affair, I shouldn’t wonder. I’ve never heard of any. I know her father favours that puppy Percy; but I don’t think she is dying for him.”

It was the dreariest Christmas Eve I had ever spent. The fire was bright; the dishes were excellent; the wine was thorough; the host was hospitable; the servants were attentive; and yet the dinner was as gloomy as if we had all known it to be the last we should ever eat together. If a ghost had been sitting in its shroud at the head of the table, instead of Adela, it could hardly have cast a greater chill over the guests. She did her duty well enough; but she did not look it; and the charities which occasioned her no pleasure in

the administration, could hardly occasion us much in the reception.

As soon as she had left the room, Percy broke out, with more emphasis than politeness,—

“What the devil’s the matter with Adela, uncle?”

“Indeed, I can’t tell, my boy,” answered the colonel, with more kindness than the form of the question deserved.

“Have you no conjecture on the subject?” I asked.

“None. I have tried hard to find out; but I have altogether failed. She tells me there is nothing the matter with her, only she is so tired. What has she to tire her?”

“If she is tired inside first, everything will tire her.”

“I wish you would try to find out, Smith.”

“I will.”

“Her mother died of a decline.”

“I know. Have you had no advice?”

“Oh, yes! Dr. Wade is giving her steel-wine, and quinine, and all that sort of thing. For my part, I don’t believe in their medicines. Certainly they don’t do her any good.”

“Is her chest affected—does he say?”

“He says not; but I believe he knows no more about the state of her chest than he does about the other side of the moon. He’s a stupid old fool. He comes here for his fees, and he has them.”

“Why don’t you call in another, if you are not satisfied?”

“Why, my dear fellow, they’re all the same in this infernal old place. I believe they’ve all embalmed themselves, and are going by clockwork. They and the clergy make sad fools of us. But we make worse fools of ourselves to have them about us. To be sure, they see that everything is proper. The doctor makes sure that we are dead before we are buried, and the parson that we are buried after we are dead. About

the resurrection I suspect he knows as much as we do. He goes by book."

In his perplexity and sorrow, the poor colonel was irritable and unjust. I saw that it would be better to suggest than to reason. And I partly took the homœopathic system—the only one on which mental distress, at least, can be treated with any advantage.

"Certainly," I said, "the medical profession has plenty of men in it who live on humanity, like the very diseases they attempt to cure. And plenty of the clergy find the Church a tolerably profitable investment. The reading of the absolution is as productive to them now as it was to the pardon-sellers of old. But surely, colonel, you won't huddle them all up together in one shapeless mass of condemnation?"

"You always were right, Smith, and I'm a fool, as usual. Percy, my boy, what's going on at Somerset House?"

"The river, uncle."

"Nothing else?"

"Well—I don't know. Nothing much. It's horribly slow!"

"I'm afraid you won't find this much better. But you must take care of yourself."

"I've made that a branch of special study, uncle. I flatter myself I *can* do that."

Colonel Cathcart laughed. Percy was the son of his only brother, who had died young, and he had an especial affection for him. And where the honest old man loved, he could see no harm; for he reasoned something in this way: "He must be all right, or how could I like him as I do?" But Percy was a commonplace, selfish fellow—of that I was convinced—whatever his other qualities, good or bad, might be; and I sincerely hoped that any designs he might have of marrying his cousin might prove as vain as his late infantile passion for the moon. For I beg to assure my readers that the cir-

cumstances in which I have introduced Adela Cathcart are no more fair to her real character, than my lady readers would consider the effect of a lamp-shade of bottle-green true in its presentation of their complexion.

We did not sit long over our wine. When we went up to the drawing-room, Adela was not there, nor did she make her appearance again that evening. For a little while we tried to talk ; but, after many failures, I yielded and withdrew on the score of fatigue ; no doubt relieving the mind of my old friend by doing so, for he had severe ideas of the duty of a host as well as of a soldier, and to these ideas he found it at present impossible to elevate the tone of his behaviour.

When I reached my own room, I threw myself into the easiest of arm-chairs, and began to reflect.

"John Smith," I said, "this is likely to be as uncomfortable a Christmas-tide as you, with your all but ubiquity, have ever had the opportunity of passing. Nevertheless, please to remember a resolution you came to once upon a time, that, as you were nobody, so you would be nobody ; and see if you can make yourself useful. What can be the matter with Adela?"

I sat and reflected for a long time ; for during my life I had had many opportunities of observation, and amongst other cases that had interested me, I had seen some not unlike the present. The fact was that, as everybody counted me nobody, I had taken full advantage of my conceded nonentity, which, like Jack the Giant-killer's coat of darkness, enabled me to learn much that would otherwise have escaped me. My reflections on my observations, however, did not lead me to any further or more practical conclusion just yet, than that other and better advice ought to be called in.

Having administered this sedative sop to my restless practicalness, I went to bed and to sleep.

CHAPTER II.

CHURCH.

ADELA did not make her appearance at the breakfast-table next morning, although it was the morning of Christmas Day. And no one who had seen her at dinner on Christmas Eve would have expected to see her at breakfast on Christmas morn. Yet although her absence was rather a relief, such a gloom occupied her place, that our party was anything but cheerful. But the world about us was happy enough, not merely at its unseen heart of fire, but on its wintered countenance—evidently to all men. It was not “to hide her guilty front,” as Milton says, in the first two—and the least worthy—stanzas on the Nativity, that the earth wooed the gentle air for innocent snow, but to put on the best smile and the loveliest dress that the cold time and her suffering state would allow, in welcome of the Lord of the snow and the summer. I thought of the lines from Crashaw’s “Hymn of the Nativity”—Crashaw, who always suggested to me Shelley turned a Catholic Priest:—

I saw the curl’d drops, soft and slow,
 Come hovering o’er the place’s head,
 Offering their whitest sheets of snow,
 To furnish the fair infant’s bed.
 Forbear, said I, be not too bold:
 Your fleece is white, but ’tis too cold.

And as the sun shone rosy with mist, I naturally thought of the next following stanza of the same hymn :—

I saw the obsequious seraphim
Their rosy fleece of fire bestow ;
For well they now can spare their wings,
Since Heaven itself lies here below.
Well done ! said I ; but are you sure
Your down, so warm, will pass for pure ?

Adela, pale face and all, was down in time for church ; and she and the colonel and I walked to it together by the meadow path, where, on each side, the green grass was peeping up through the glittering frost. For the colonel, notwithstanding his last night's outbreak upon the clergy, had a profound respect for them, and considered church-going one of those military duties which belonged to every honest soldier and gentleman. Percy had found employment elsewhere.

It was a blessed little church that, standing in a little meadow churchyard, with a low strong ancient tower, and great buttresses that put one in mind of the rock of ages, and a mighty still river that flowed past the tower end, and a picturesque, straggling, well-to-do parsonage at the chancel end. The church was nearly covered with ivy, and looked as if it had grown out of the churchyard, to be ready for the poor folks, as soon as they got up again, to praise God in. But it had stood a long time, and none of them came ; and the praise of the living must be a poor thing to the praise of the dead, notwithstanding all that the Psalmist says. So the church got disheartened, and drooped, and now looked very old and grey-headed. It could not get itself filled with praise enough. And into this old, and quaint, and weary but stout-hearted church, we went that bright winter morning, to hear about a baby. My heart was full enough before I left it.

Old Mr. Venables read the service with a voice and manner

far more memorial of departed dinners than of joys to come ; but I sat—little heeding the service, I confess—with my mind full of thoughts that made me glad.

Now all my glad thoughts came to me through a hole in the tower-door. For the door was far in a shadowy retreat, and in the irregular lozenge-shaped hole in it, there was a piece of coarse thick glass of a deep yellow. And through this yellow glass the sun shone. And the cold shine of the winter sun was changed into the warm glory of summer by the magic of that bit of glass.

Now when I saw the glow first, I thought without thinking, that it came from some inner place, some shrine of old, or some ancient tomb in the chancel of the church—forgetting the points of the compass—where one might pray as in the *penetralia* of the temple ; and I gazed on it as the pilgrim might gaze upon the lamp-light oozing from the cavern of the Holy Sepulchre. But some one opened the door, and the clear light of the Christmas morn broke upon the pavement, and swept away the summer splendour. The door was to the outside.—And I said to myself, “All the doors that lead inwards to the secret place of the Most High, are doors outwards—out of self—out of smallness—out of wrong.” And these were some of the thoughts that came to me through the hole in the door, and made me forget the service, which Mr. Venables mumbled like a nicely cooked sweetbread.

But another voice broke the film that shrouded the ears of my brain, and the words became inspired and alive, and I forgot my own thoughts in listening to the Holy Book. For is not the voice of every loving spirit a fresh inspiration to the dead letter ? With a voice other than this, does it not kill ? And I thought I had heard the voice before, but where I sat I could not see the Communion Table. At length the preacher ascended the pulpit stairs, and, to my delight and

the rousing of an altogether unwonted expectation, who should it be but my fellow-traveller of last night !

He had a look of having something to say ; and I immediately felt that I had something to hear. Having read his text, which I forget, the broad-browed man began with something like this,—

“It is not the high summer alone that is God’s. The winter also is His. And into His winter He came to visit us. And all man’s winters are His—the winter of our poverty, the winter of our sorrow, the winter of our unhappiness—even ‘the winter of our discontent.’”

I stole a glance at Adela. Her large eyes were fixed on the preacher.

“Winter,” he went on, “does not belong to death, although the outside of it looks like death. Beneath the snow, the grass is growing. Below the frost, the roots are warm and alive. Winter is only a spring too weak and feeble for us to see that it is living. The cold does for all things what the gardener has sometimes to do for valuable trees: he must half kill them before they will bear any fruit. Winter is in truth the small beginnings of the spring.”

I glanced at Adela again ; and still her eyes were fastened on the speaker.

“The winter is the childhood of the year. Into this childhood of the year came the child Jesus ; and into this childhood of the year must we all descend. It is as if God spoke to each of us according to our need, ‘My son, my daughter, you are growing old and cunning ; you must grow a child again, with my Son, this blessed birth-time. You are growing old and selfish ; you must become a child. You are growing old and careful ; you must become a child. You are growing old and distrustful ; you must become a child. You are growing old and petty, and weak, and foolish ; you must become a

child—my child, like the baby there, that strong sunrise of faith and hope and love, lying in his mother's arms in the stable.'

"But one may say to me, 'You are talking in a dream. The Son of God is a child no longer. He is the King of Heaven.' True, my friends. But He who is the Unchangeable could never become anything that He was not always, for that would be to change. He is as much a child now as ever he was. When he became a child, it was only to show us by itself that we might understand it better what He was always in his deepest nature. And when he was a child, he was not less the King of Heaven; for it is in virtue of His childhood, of his sonship, that he is Lord of Heaven and of Earth—'for of such'—namely, of children—'is the kingdom of heaven.' And, therefore, when we think of the baby now, it is still of the Son of man, of the King of men, that we think. And all the feelings that the thought of that babe can wake in us are as true now as they were on that first Christmas Day, when Mary covered from the cold his little naked feet, ere long to be washed with the tears of repentant women, and nailed by the hands of thoughtless men, who knew not what they did, to the cross of fainting, and desolation, and death."

Adela was hiding her face now.

"So, my friends, let us be children this Christmas. Of course, when I say to any one, 'You must be like a child,' I mean a good child. A naughty child is not a child as long as his naughtiness lasts. He is not what God meant when He said, 'I will make a child.' Think of the best child you know—the one who has filled you with most admiration. It is his child-likeness that has so delighted you. It is because he is so true to the child-nature that you admire him. Jesus is like that child. You must be like that child. But you cannot help knowing some faults in him—some things that are

like ill-grown men and women. Jesus is not like him, there. Think of the best child you can imagine; nay, think of a better than you can imagine—of the one that God thinks of when he invents a child in the depth of his Fatherhood: such child-like men and women must you one day become; and what day better to begin than this blessed Christmas Morn? Let such a child be born in your hearts this day. Take the child Jesus to your bosoms, into your very souls, and let him grow there till he is one with your every thought, and purpose, and hope. As a good child born in a family will make the family good; so Jesus, born into the world, will make the world good at last. And this perfect child, born in your hearts, will make your hearts good; and that is God's best gift to you.

"Then be happy this Christmas Day; for to you a child is born. Childless women, this infant is yours—wives or maidens. Fathers and mothers, he is your first-born, and he will save his brethren. Eat and drink, and be merry and kind, for the love of God is the source of all joy and all good things, and this love is present in the child Jesus.—Now, to God the Father, &c."

"O my baby Lord!" I said in my heart; for the clergyman had forgotten me, and said nothing about us old bachelors.

Of course this is but the substance of the sermon; and as, although I came to know him well before many days were over, he never lent me his manuscript—indeed, I doubt if he had any—my report must have lost something of his nervous strength, and be diluted with the weakness of my style.

Although I had been attending so well to the sermon, however, my eyes had now and then wandered, not only to Adela's face, but all over the church as well; and I could not help observing, a few pillars off, and partly round a corner, the face of a young man—well, he was about thirty, I should guess—out of which looked a pair of well-opened hazel eyes,

with rather notable eyelashes. Not that I, with my own weak pair of washed-out grey, could see the eyelashes at that distance, but I judged it must be their length that gave a kind of feminine cast to the outline of the eyes. Nor should I have noticed the face itself much, had it not seemed to me that those eyes were pursuing a very thievish course; for, by the fact that, as often as I looked their way, I saw the motion of their withdrawal, I concluded that they were stealing glances at, certainly not from, my adopted niece, Adela. This made me look at the face more attentively. I found it a fine, frank, brown, country-looking face. Could it have anything to do with Adela's condition? Absurd! How could such health and ruddy life have anything to do with the worn pallor of her countenance? Nor did a single glance on the part of Adela reveal that she was aware of the existence of the neighbouring observatory. I dismissed the idea. And I was right, as time showed.

We remained to the Communion. When that was over, we walked out of the old dark-roofed church, Adela looking as sad as ever, into the bright cold sunshine, which wrought no change on her demeanour. How could it, if the sun of righteousness, even, had failed for the time? And there, in the churchyard, we found Percy, standing astride of an infant's grave, with his hands in his trouser-pockets, and an air of condescending satisfaction on his countenance, which seemed to say to the dead beneath him,—

“Pray, don't apologize. I know you are disagreeable; but you can't help it, you know;”

—and to the living coming out of church,—

“Well, have you had your little whim out?”

But what he did say, was to Adela,—

“A merry Christmas to you, Addie! Won't you lean on me? You don't look very stunning.”

But her sole answer was to take my arm ; and so we walked towards the Swanspond.

"I suppose that's what they call *Broad Church*," said the colonel.

"Generally speaking, I prefer breadth," I answered vaguely. "Do you think that's *Broad Church*?"

"Oh ! I don't know. I suppose it's all right. He ran me through, anyhow."

"I hope it *is* all right," I answered. "It suits me."

"Well, I'm sure you know ten times better than I do. He seems a right sort of man, whatever sort of clergyman he may be."

"Who is he—can you tell me?"

"Why, don't you know? That's our new curate, Mr. Armstrong."

"Curate !" I exclaimed. "A man like that ! And at his years too ! He must be forty. You astonish me !"

"Well, I don't know. He may be forty. He is our curate, that is all I can answer for."

"He was my companion in the train last night."

"Ah ! that accounts for it. You had some talk with him, and found him out ? I believe he is a superior sort of man, too. Old Mr. Venables seems to like him."

"All the talk I have had with him passed between pulpit and pew this morning," I replied ; "for the only words that we exchanged last night were, 'Will you join me in a cigar ?' from him, and 'With much pleasure,' from me."

"Then, upon my life, I can't see what you think remarkable in his being a curate. Though I confess, as I said before, he ran me through the body. I'm rather soft-hearted, I believe, since Addie's illness."

He gave her a hasty glance. But she took no notice of what he had said ; and, indeed, seemed to have taken no notice of the conversation—to which Percy had shown an

equal amount of indifference. A very different indifference seemed the only bond between them.

When we reached home, we found lunch ready for us, and after waiting a few minutes for Adela, but in vain, we seated ourselves at the table.

"Awfully like Sunday, and a cold dinner, uncle!" remarked Percy.

"We'll make up for that, my boy, when dinner-time comes."

"You don't like Sunday, then, Mr. Percy?" I said.

"A horrid bore," he answered. "My old mother made me hate it. We had to go to church twice; and that was even worse than her veal-broth. But the worst of it is, I can't get it out of my head that I ought to be there, even when I'm driving tandem to Richmond."

"Ah! your mother will be with us on Sunday, I hope, Percy."

"Good heavens, uncle! Do you know what you are about? My mother here! I'll just ring the bell, and tell James to pack my traps. I won't stand it. I can't. Indeed I can't."

He rose as he spoke. His uncle caught him by the arm, laughing, and made him sit down again; which he did with real or pretended reluctance.

"We'll take care of you, Percy. Never mind. Don't be a fool," he added, seeing the evident annoyance of the young fellow.

"Well, uncle, you ought to have known better," said Percy, sulkily, as yielding, he resumed his seat, and poured himself out a bumper of claret, by way of consolation.

He had not been much of a companion before; now he made himself almost as unpleasant as a young man could be, and that is saying a great deal. One, certainly, had need to have found something beautiful at church, for here was the

prospect of as wretched a Christmas dinner as one could ever wish to avoid.

When Percy had drunk another bumper of claret, he rose and left the room ; and my host, turning to me, said,—

“ I fear, Smith, you will have anything but a merry Christmas, this year. I hoped the sight of you would cheer up poor Adela, and set us all right. And now Percy’s out of humour at the thought of his mother coming, and I’m sure I don’t know what’s to be done. We shall sit over our dinner to-day like four crows over a carcase. It’s very good of you to stop.”

“ Oh ! never mind me,” I said. “ I too can take care of myself. But has Adela no companions of her own age ? ”

“ None but Percy. And I am afraid she has got tired of him. He’s a good fellow, though a bit of a puppy. That’ll wear off. I wish he would take a fancy to the army, now.”

I made no reply, but I thought the more. It seemed to me that to get tired of Percy was the most natural proceeding that could be adopted with regard to him and all about him.

But men judge men—and women, women—hardly.

“ I’ll tell you what I will do,” said the colonel. “ I will ask Mr. Bloomfield, the schoolmaster, and his wife, to dine with us. It’s no use asking anybody else that I can think of. But they have no family, and I daresay they can put off their own Christmas dinner till to-morrow. They have but one maid, and she can dine with our servants. They are very respectable people, I assure you.”

The colonel always considered his plans thoroughly, and then acted on them at once. He rose.

“ A capital idea ! ” I said, as he disappeared.

I went up to look for Adela. She was not in the drawing-room. I went up again, and tapped at the door of her room.

“ Come in,” she said, in a listless voice.

I entered.

"How are you now, Adela?" I asked.

"Thank you, uncle," was all her reply.

"What is the matter with you, my child?" I said, and drew a chair near hers. She was half reclining, with a book lying upside down on her knee.

"I would tell you at once, uncle, if I knew," she answered very sweetly, but as sadly. "I believe I am dying; but of what I have not the smallest idea."

"Nonsense!" I said. "You're not dying."

"You need not think to comfort me that way, uncle; for I think I would rather die than not."

"Is there anything you would like?"

"Nothing. There is nothing worth liking, but sleep."

"Don't you sleep at night?"

"Not well. I will tell you all I know about it. Some six weeks ago, I woke suddenly one morning, very early—I think about three o'clock—with an overpowering sense of blackness and misery. Everything I thought of seemed to have a core of wretchedness in it. I fought with the feeling as well as I could, and got to sleep again. But the effect of it did not leave me next day. I said to myself, 'They say "morning thoughts are true." What if this should be the true way of looking at things?' And everything became grey and dismal about me. Next morning it was just the same. It was as if I had waked in the middle of some chaos over which God had never said, 'Let there be light.' And the next day was worse. I began to see the bad in everything—wrong motives—and self-love—and pretence, and everything mean and low. And so it has gone on ever since. I wake wretched every morning. I am crowded with wretched, if not wicked thoughts, all day. Nothing seems worth anything. I don't care for anything."

"But you love somebody?"

"I hope I love my father. I don't know. I don't feel as if I did."

"And there's your cousin Percy?" I confess this was a feeler I put out.

"Percy's a fool!" she said, with some show of indignation, which I hailed, for more reasons than one.

"But you enjoyed the sermon this morning, did you not?"

"I don't know. I thought it very poetical and very pretty; but whether it was true—how could I tell? I didn't care. The baby he spoke about was nothing to me. I didn't love him, or want to hear about him. Don't you think me a brute, uncle?"

"No, I don't. I think you are ill. And I think we shall find something that will do you good; but I can't tell yet what. You will dine with us, won't you?"

"Oh! yes, if you and papa wish it."

"Of course we do. He is just gone to ask Mr. and Mrs. Bloomfield to dine with us."

"Oh!"

"You don't mind, do you?"

"Oh, no. They are nice people. I like them both."

"Well, I will leave you, my child. Sleep if you can. I will go and walk in the garden, and think what can be done for my little girl."

"Thank you, uncle. But you can't do me any good. What if this should be the true way of things? It is better to know it, if it is."

"Disease couldn't make a sun in the heavens. But it could make a man blind, that he could not see it."

"I don't understand you."

"Never mind. It's of no consequence whether you do or not. When you see light again, you will believe in it. For light compels faith."

"I believe in you, uncle ; I do."

"Thank you, my dear. Good-bye."

I went round by the stables, and there found the colonel, talking to his groom. He had returned already from his call, and the Bloomfields were coming. I met Percy next, sauntering about, with a huge cigar in his mouth.

"The Bloomfields are coming to dinner, Mr. Percy," I said.

"Who are they ?"

"The schoolmaster and his wife."

"Just like that precious old uncle of mine ! Why the deuce did he ask *me* this Christmas ? I tell you what, Mr. Smith—I can't stand it. There's nothing, not even cards, to amuse a fellow. And when my mother comes, it will be ten times worse. I'll cut and run for it."

"Oh ! no, you won't," I said. But I heartily wished he would. I confess the insincerity, and am sorry for it.

"But what the devil does my mother want coming here ?"

"I haven't the pleasure of knowing your mother, so I cannot tell what the devil she can want coming here."

"Humph !"

He walked away.

CHAPTER III.

THE CHRISTMAS DINNER.

MR. AND MRS. BLOOMFIELD arrived ; the former a benevolent, grey-haired man, with a large nose and small mouth, yet with nothing of the foolish look which often accompanies such a malconformation ; and the latter a nice-looking little body, middle-aged, rather more ; with half-grey curls, and a cap with black ribbons. Indeed, they were both in mourning. Mr. Bloomfield bore himself with a kind of unworldly grace, and Mrs. Bloomfield with a kind of sweet primness. The schoolmaster was inclined to be talkative ; nor was his wife behind him ; and that was just what we wanted.

"I am sorry to see you in mourning," said the colonel to Mr. Bloomfield, during dessert. "I trust it is for no near relative."

"No relative at all, sir. But a boy of mine, to whom, through God's grace, I did a good turn once, and whom, as a consequence, I loved ever after."

"Tell Colonel Cathcart the story, James," said his wife. "It can do no harm to anybody now ; and you needn't mention names, you know. You would like to hear it, wouldn't you, sir ?"

"Very much indeed," answered the colonel.

"Well, sir," began the schoolmaster, "there's not much in

it to you, I fear ; though there was a good deal to him and me. I was usher in a school at Peckham once. I was but a lad, but I tried to do my duty ; and the first part of my duty seemed to me to take care of the characters of the boys. So I tried to understand them all, and their ways of looking at things, and thinking about them.

“One day, to the horror of the masters, it was discovered that a watch belonging to one of the boys had been stolen. The boy who had lost it was making a dreadful fuss about it, and declaring he would tell the police, and set them to find it. The moment I heard of it, my suspicion fell, half by knowledge, half by instinct, upon a certain boy. He was one of the most gentlemanly boys in the school ; but there was a look of cunning in the corner of his eye, and a look of greed in the corner of his mouth, which now and then came out clear enough to me. Well, sir, I pondered for a few moments what I should do. I wanted to avoid calling any attention to him ; so I contrived to make the worst of him in the Latin class—he was not a bad scholar—and so keep him in when the rest went to play. As soon as they were gone, I took him into my own room, and said to him, ‘Fred, my boy, you knew your lesson well enough ; but I wanted you here. You stole Simmons’s watch.’”

“You had better mention no names, Mr. Bloomfield,” interrupted his wife.

“I beg your pardon, my dear. But it doesn’t matter. Simmons was eaten by a tiger, ten years ago. And I hope he agreed with him, for he never did with anybody else I ever heard of. He was the worst boy I ever knew. ‘You stole Simmons’s watch. Where is it?’ He fell on his knees, as white as a sheet. ‘I sold it,’ he said, in a voice choked with terror. ‘God help you, my boy!’ I exclaimed. He burst out crying. ‘Where did you sell it?’ He told me,

‘Where’s the money you got for it?’ ‘That’s all I have left,’ he answered, pulling out a small handful of shillings and half-crowns. ‘Give it me,’ I said. He gave it me at once. ‘Now you go to your lesson, and hold your tongue.’ I got a sovereign of my own to make up the sum—I could ill spare it, sir, but the boy could worse spare his character—and I hurried off to the place where he had sold the watch. To avoid scandal, I was forced to pay the man the whole price, though I daresay an older man would have managed better. At all events, I brought it home. I contrived to put it in the boy’s own box, so that the whole affair should appear to have been only a trick, and then I gave the culprit a very serious talking-to. He never did anything of the sort again, and died an honourable man and a good officer, only three months ago, in India. A thousand times over did that repay me the money I had spent for him, and he left me this gold watch in his will—a memorial, not so much of his fault, as of his deliverance from some of its natural consequences.”

The schoolmaster pulled out the watch as he spoke, and we all looked at it with respect.

It was a simple story and simply told. But I was pleased to see that Adela took some interest in it. I remembered that, as a child, she had always liked better to be told a story than to have any other amusement whatever. And many a story I had had to coin on the spur of the moment for the satisfaction of her childish avidity for that kind of mental bull’s-eye.

When we gentlemen were left alone, and the servants had withdrawn, Mr. Bloomfield said to our host,—

“I am sorry to see Miss Cathcart looking so far from well, colonel. I hope you have good advice for her.”

“Dr. Wade has been attending her for some time, but I don’t think he’s doing her any good.”

"Don't you think it might be well to get the new doctor to see her? He's quite a remarkable man, I assure you."

"What! The young fellow that goes flying about the country in boots and breeches?"

"Well, I suppose that is the man I mean. He's not so very young though—he's thirty at least. And for the boots and breeches—I asked him once, in a joking way, whether he did not think them rather unprofessional. But he told me he saved ever so much time in open weather by going across the country. 'And,' said he, 'if I can see patients sooner, and more of them, in that way, I think it is quite professional. The other day,' he said, 'I was sent for, and I went straight as the crow flies, and I beat a little baby only by five minutes after all.' Of course after that there was nothing more to say."

"He has very queer notions, hasn't he?"

"Yes, he has, for a medical man. He goes to church, for instance."

"I don't count that a fault."

"Well, neither do I. Rather the contrary. But one of the profession here says it is for the sake of being called out in the middle of the service."

"Oh! that is stale. I don't think he would find that answer. But it is a pity he is not married."

"So it is. I wish he were. But that is a fault that may be remedied some day. One thing I know about him is, that when I called him in to see one of my boarders, he sat by his bedside half an hour, watching him, and then went away without giving him any medicine."

"I don't see the good of that. What do you make of that? I call it very odd."

"He said to me: 'I am not sure what is the matter with him. A wrong medicine would do him more harm than the

right one would do him good. Meantime he is in no danger. I will come and see him to-morrow morning.' Now I liked that, because it showed me that he was thinking over the case. The boy was well in two days. Not that that indicates much. All I say is, he is not a common man."

"I don't like to dismiss Dr. Wade."

"No; but you must not stand on ceremony, if he is doing her no good. You are judge enough of that."

I thought it best to say nothing; but I heartily approved of all the honest gentleman said; and I meant to use my persuasion afterwards, if necessary, to the same end; for I liked all he told about the new doctor. I asked his name.

"Mr. Armstrong," answered the schoolmaster.

"Armstrong—" I repeated. "Is not that the name of the new curate?"

"To be sure. They are brothers. Henry, the doctor, is considerably younger than the curate."

"Did the curate seek the appointment because the doctor was here before him?"

"I suppose so. They are much attached to each other."

"If he is at all equal as a doctor to what I think his brother is as a preacher, Purley-bridge is a happy place to possess two such healers," I said.

"Well, time will show," returned Mr. Bloomfield.

All this time Percy sat yawning, and drinking claret. When we joined the ladies, we found them engaged in a little gentle chat. There was something about Mrs. Bloomfield that was very pleasing. The chief ingredient in it was a certain quaint repose. She looked as if her heart were at rest; as if for her everything was right; as if she had a little room of her own, just to her mind, and there her soul sat, looking out through the muslin curtains of modest charity, upon the world that went hurrying and seething past her windows. When we entered—

"I was just beginning to tell Miss Cathcart," she said, "a curious history that came under my notice once. I don't know if I ought though, for it is rather sad."

"Oh! I like sad stories," said Adela.

"Well, there isn't much of romance in it either, but I will cut it short now the gentlemen are come. I knew the lady. She had been married some years. And report said her husband was not overkind to her. All at once she disappeared, and her husband thought the worst of her. Knowing her as well as I did, I did not believe a word of it. Yet it was strange that she had left her baby, her only child, of a few months, as well as her husband. I went to see her mother directly I heard of it, and together we went to the police; and such a search as we had! We traced her to a wretched lodging, where she had been for two nights, but they did not know what had become of her. In fact, they had turned her out because she had no money. Some information that we had, made us go to a house near Hyde Park. We rang the bell. Who should open the door, in a neat cap and print-gown, but the poor lady herself! She fainted when she saw her mother. And then the whole story came out. Her husband was stingy, and only allowed her a very small sum for housekeeping; and perhaps she was not a very good manager, for good management is a gift, and everybody has not got it. So she found that she could not clear off the butcher's bills on the sum allowed her; and she had let the debt gather and gather, till the thought of it, I believe, actually drove her out of her mind for the time. She dared not tell her husband; but she knew it must come out some day, and so at last, quite frantic with the thought of it, she ran away, and left her baby behind her."

"And what became of her?" asked Adela.

"Her husband would never hear a word in her favour. He

laughed at her story in the most scornful way, and said he was too old a bird for that. In fact, I believe he never saw her again. She went to her mother's. She will have her child now, I suppose ; for I hear that the wretch of a husband, who would not let her have him, is dead. I dare say she is happy at last. Poor thing ! Some people would need stout hearts, and have not got them."

Adela sighed. The story, too, seemed to interest her.

"What a miserable life !" she said.

"Well, Miss Cathcart," said the schoolmaster, "no doubt it was. But every life that has to be lived, can be lived ; and however impossible it may seem to the onlookers, it has its own consolations, or, at least, interests. And I always fancy the most indispensable thing to a life is, that it should be interesting to those who have it to live. My wife and I have come through a good deal, but the time when the life looked hardest to others, was not, probably, the least interesting to us. It is just like reading a book : anything will do if you are taken up with it."

"Very good philosophy ! Isn't it, Adela ?" said the colonel.

Adela cast her eyes down, as if with a despairing sense of rebuke, and did not reply.

"I wish you would tell Miss Cathcart," resumed the schoolmaster to his wife, "that little story about the foolish lad you met once. And you need not keep back the little of your own history that belongs to it. I am sure the colonel will excuse you."

"I insist on hearing the whole of it," said the colonel, with a smile.

And Mrs. Bloomfield began.

Let me say here that I cannot keep the story from partaking of my own peculiarities of style, any more than I could keep

the sermon free of such ; but I believe I have wandered very little from the original.

Mrs. Bloomfield, I say, began:—

“ A good many years ago, now, on a warm summer evening, a friend, whom I was visiting, asked me to take a drive with her through one of the London parks. I agreed to go, though I did not care much about it. I had not breathed the fresh air for some weeks ; yet I felt it a great trouble to go. I had been ill, and my husband was ill, and we had nothing to do, and we did not know what would become of us. So I was anything but cheerful. I *knew* that all was for the best, as my good husband was always telling me, but my eyes were dim and my heart was troubled, and I could not feel sure that God cared quite so much for us as he did for the lilies.

“ My friend was very cheerful, and seemed to enjoy everything ; but a kind of dreariness came over me, and I began comparing the loveliness of the summer evening with the cold misty blank that seemed to make up my future. My wretchedness grew greater and greater. The very colours of the flowers, the blue of the sky, the sleep of the water, seemed to push us out of the happy world that God had made. And yet the children seemed as happy as if God were busy making the things before their eyes, and holding out each thing, as he made it, for them to look at.

“ I should have told you that we had two children then.”

“ I did not know you had any family,” interposed the colonel.

“ Yes, we had two then. One of them is now in India, and the other was not long out of heaven. Well, I was glad when my friend stopped the carriage, and got out with the children, to take them close to the water’s edge, and let them feed the swans. I liked better to sit in the carriage alone—an ungrateful creature, in the midst of causes for thankfulness. I

did not care for the beautiful things about me ; and I was not even pleased that other people should enjoy them. I listlessly watched the well-dressed ladies that passed, and hearkened contemptuously to the drawling way in which they spoke. So bad and proud was I, that I said in my heart, 'Thank God ! I am not like them yet !' Then came nurse-maids and children ; and I did envy the servants, because they had work to do, and health to do it, and wages for it when it was done. The carriage was standing still all this time, you know. Then sickly-looking men passed, with still more sickly-looking wives, some of them leading a child between them. But even their faces told of wages, and the pleasure of an evening's walk in the park. And now I was able to thank God that they had the parks to walk in. Then came tottering by, an old man, apparently of eighty years, leaning on the arm of his granddaughter, I supposed—a tidy, gentle-looking maiden. As they passed, I heard the old man say : 'He maketh me to lie down in green pastures ; He leadeth me beside the still waters.' And his quiet face looked as if the fields were yet green to his eyes, and the still waters as pleasant as when he was a little child.

"At last I caught sight of a poor lad, who was walking along very slowly, looking at a gay-coloured handkerchief which he had spread out before him. His clothes were rather ragged, but not so ragged as old. On his head was what we now call a wide-awake. It was very limp and shapeless ; but some one that loved him had trimmed it with a bit of blue ribbon, the ends of which hung down on his shoulder. This gave him an odd appearance even at a distance. When he came up and I could see his face, it explained everything. There was a constant smile about his mouth, which in itself was very sweet ; but as it had nothing to do with the rest of the countenance, the chief impression it conveyed was of

idiotcy. He came near the carriage, and stood there, watching some men who were repairing the fence which divided the road from the footpath. His hair was almost golden, and went waving about in the wind. His eye was very large and clear, and of a bright blue. But it had no meaning in it. He would have been very handsome, had there been mind in his face; but as it was, the very regularity of his unlighted features made the sight a sadder one. His figure was young; but his face might have belonged to a man of sixty.

"He opened his mouth, stuck out his under jaw, and stood staring and grinning at the men. At last one of them stopped to take breath, and, catching sight of the lad, called out,—

"‘Why, Davy! is that you?’

"‘Ya-as, it be,’ replied Davy, nodding his head.

"‘Why, Davy, it’s ever so long since I clapped eyes on ye!’ said the man. ‘Where ha’ ye been?’

"‘I ain’t been nowheres, as I knows on.’

"‘Well, if ye ain’t been nowheres, what have ye been doing? Flying your kite?’

"Davy shook his head sorrowfully, and at the same time kept on grinning foolishly.

"‘I ain’t got no kite; so I can’t fly it.’

"‘But you likes flyin’ kites, don’t ye?’ said his friend, kindly.

"‘Ya-as,’ answered Davy, nodding his head, and rubbing his hands, and laughing out. ‘Kites is such fun! I wish I’d got un.’

"Then he looked thoughtfully, almost moodily, at the man, and said,—

"‘Where’s *your* kite? I likes kites. Kites is friends to me.’

"But by this time the man had turned again to his work, and was busy driving a post into the ground; so he paid no attention to the lad’s question."

"Why, Mrs. Bloomfield," interrupted the colonel, "I should just like you to send out with a reconnoitring party, for you seem to see everything and forget nothing."

"You see best and remember best what most interests you, colonel; and besides that, I got a good rebuke to my ingratitude from that poor fellow. So you see I had reason to remember him. I hope I don't tire you, Miss Cathcart?"

"Quite the contrary," answered our hostess.

"By this time," resumed Mrs. Bloomfield, "another man had come up. He had a coarse, hard-featured face; and he tried, or pretended to try, to wheel his barrow, which was full of gravel, over Davy's toes. The said toes were sticking quite bare through great holes in an old pair of woman's boots. Then he began to tease him rather roughly. But Davy took all his banter with just the same complacency and mirth with which he had received the kindness of the other man.

"'How's yer sweetheart, Davy?' he said.

"'Quite well, thank ye,' answered Davy.

"'What's her name?'

"'Ha! ha! ha! I won't tell ye that.'

"'Come now, Davy, tell us her name.'

"'Noa.'

"'Don't be a fool.'

"'I ain't a fool. But I won't tell you her name.'

"'I don't believe ye've got e'er a sweetheart. Come now.'

"'I have though.'

"'I don't believe ye.'

"'I have though. I was at church with her last Sunday.'

"Suddenly the man, looking hard at Davy, changed his tone to one of surprise, and exclaimed,—

"'Why, boy, ye've got whiskers! Ye hadn't *them* the last time I see'd ye. Why, ye *are* set up now! When are ye going to begin to shave? Where's your razors?'

“ ‘Ain’t begun yet,’ replied Davy. ‘Shall shave some day, but I ain’t got too much yet.’ ”

“As he said this, he fondled away at his whiskers. They were few in number, but evidently of great value in his eyes. Then he began to stroke his chin, on which there was a little down visible—more like mould in its association with his curious face than anything of more healthy significance. After a few moments’ pause, his tormentor began again,—

“ ‘Well, I can’t think where ye got them whiskers as ye’re so fond of. Do ye know where ye got them?’ ”

“Davy took out his pocket-handkerchief, spread it out before him, and stopped grinning.

“ ‘Ya-as; to be sure I do,’ he said at last.

“ ‘Ye do?’ growled the man, half humorously, half scornfully.

“ ‘Ya-as,’ said Davy, nodding his head again and again.

“ ‘Did ye buy ’em?’ ”

“ ‘Noa,’ answered Davy; and the sweetness of the smile which he now smiled was not confined to his mouth, but broke like light, the light of intelligence, over his whole face.

“ ‘Were they gave to ye?’ pursued the man, now really curious to hear what he would say.

“ ‘Ya-as,’ said the poor fellow; and he clapped his hands in a kind of suppressed glee.

“ ‘Why, who gave ’em to ye?’ ”

“Davy looked up in a way I shall never forget, and, pointing up with his finger too, said nothing.

“ ‘What do ye mean?’ said the man. ‘Who gave ye yer whiskers?’ ”

“Davy pointed up to the sky again; and then, looking up with an earnest expression, which, before you saw it, you would not have have thought possible to his face, said,—

“ ‘Blessed Father.’ ”

“ ‘Who?’ shouted the man.

“ ‘Blessed Father,’ Davy repeated, once more pointing upwards.

“ ‘Blessed Father!’ returned the man, in a contemptuous tone; ‘Blessed Father!—I don’t know who *that* is. Where does he live? I never heerd on *him*.’

“ Davy looked at him as if he were sorry for him. Then going closer up to him, he said,—

“ ‘Didn’t you though? He lives up there’—again pointing to the sky. ‘And he is so kind! He gives me lots o’ things.’

“ ‘Well!’ said the man, ‘I wish he’d give me things. But you don’t look so very rich nayther.’

“ ‘Oh! but he gives me lots o’ things; and he’s up there, and he gives everybody lots o’ things as likes to have ’em.’

“ ‘Well, what’s he gave you?’

“ ‘Why, he’s gave me some bread this mornin’, and a tart last night—he did.’

“ And the boy nodded his head, as was his custom, to make his assertion still stronger.

“ ‘But you was sayin’ just now, you hadn’t got a kite. Why don’t he give you one?’

“ ‘*He’ll* give me one fast ’nuff,’ said Davy, grinning again, and rubbing his hands.

“ Miss Cathcart, I assure you I could have kissed the boy. And I hope I felt some gratitude to God for giving the poor lad such trust in Him, which, it seemed to me, was better than trusting in the three-per-cents., colonel; for you can draw upon him to no end o’ good things. So Davy thought anyhow; and he had got the very thing for the want of which my life was cold and sad, and discontented. Those words, ‘Blessed Father,’ and that look that turned his vacant face, like Stephen’s, into the face of an angel, because he was looking up to the same glory, were in my ears and eyes for days. And they

taught me, and comforted me. He was the minister of God's best gifts to me. And to how many more, who can tell? For Davy believed that God did care for his own children.

"Davy sauntered away, and before my friend came back with the children, I had lost sight of him ; but at my request we moved on slowly till we should find him again. Nor had we gone far, before I saw him sitting in the middle of a group of little children. He was showing them the pictures on his pocket-handkerchief. I had one sixpence in my purse—it was the last I had, Mr. Smith."

Here, from some impulse or other, Mrs. Bloomfield addressed me.

"But I wasn't so poor but I could borrow, and it was a small price to give for what I had got ; and so, as I was not able to leave the carriage, I asked my friend to take it to him, and tell him that Blessed Father had sent him that to buy a kite. The expression of childish glee upon his face, and the devout 'God bless you, lady,' upon his tongue, were strangely but not incongruously mingled.

"Well, it was my last sixpence then, but here I and my husband are, owing no man anything, and spending a happy Christmas Day, with many thanks to Colonel and Miss Cathcart."

"No, my good madam," said the colonel ; "it is we who owe you the happiest part of our Christmas Day. Is it not Adela?"

"Yes, papa, it is indeed," answered Adela.

Then, with some hesitation, she added,—

"But do you think it was quite fair? It was *you*, Mrs. Bloomfield, who gave the boy the sixpence."

"I only said God sent it," said Mrs. Bloomfield.

"Besides," I interposed, "the boy never doubted it ; and I think, after all, with due submission to my niece, he was the best judge."

"I should be only too happy to grant it," she answered, with a sigh. "Things might be all right if one could believe that—thoroughly, I mean."

"At least you will allow," I said, "that this boy was not by any means so miserable as he looked."

"Certainly," she answered, with hearty emphasis. "I think he was much to be envied."

Here I discovered that Percy was asleep on a sofa.

Other talk followed, and the colonel was looking very thoughtful. Tea was brought in, and soon after, our visitors rose to take their leave.

"You are not going already?" said the colonel.

"If you will excuse us," answered the schoolmaster. "We are early birds."

"Well, will you dine with us this day week?"

"With much pleasure," answered both in a breath.

It was clear both that the colonel liked their simple honest company, and that he saw they might do his daughter good; for her face looked very earnest and sweet; and the clearness that precedes rain was evident in the atmosphere of her eyes.

After their departure we soon separated; and I retired to my room full of a new idea, which I thought, if well carried out, might be of still further benefit to the invalid.

But before I went to bed, I had made a rough translation of the following hymn of Luther's, which I have since completed—so far at least as the following is complete. I often find that it helps to keep good thoughts before the mind, to turn them into another shape of words.

From heaven above I come to you
To bring a story good and new:
Of goodly news so much I bring—
I cannot help it, I must sing.

To you a child is come this morn,
A child of holy maiden born ;
A little babe, so sweet and mild—
It is a joy to see the child !

'Tis little Jesus, whom we need
Us out of sadness all to lead :
He will himself our Saviour be,
And from all sinning set us free.

Here come the shepherds, whom we know ;
Let all of us right gladsome go,
To see what God to us hath given—
A gift that makes a stable heaven.

Take heed, my heart. Be lowly. So
Thou seest him lie in manger low :
That is the baby sweet and mild ;
That is the little Jesus-child.

Ah, Lord ! the maker of us all !
How hast thou grown so poor and small,
That there thou liest on wither'd grass—
The supper of the ox and ass ?

Were the world wider many-fold,
And deck'd with gems and cloth of gold,
'Twere far too mean and narrow all,
To make for Thee a cradle small.

Rough hay, and linen not too fine,
The silk and velvet that are thine ;
Yet, as they were thy kingdom great,
Thou liest in them in royal state.

And this, all this, hath pleased Thee,
That Thou mightst bring this truth to me
That all earth's good, in one combined,
Is nothing to Thy mighty mind.

Ah, little Jesus! lay thy head
Down in a soft, white, little bed,
That waits Thee in this heart of mine,
And then this heart is always Thine.

Such gladness in my heart would make
Me dance and sing for Thy sweet sake.
Glory to God in highest heaven,
For He his son to us hath given !

CHAPTER IV

THE NEW DOCTOR.

NEXT forenoon, wishing to have a little private talk with my friend, I went to his room, and found him busy writing to Dr. Wade. He consulted me on the contents of the letter, and I was heartily pleased with the kind way in which he communicated to the old gentleman the resolution he had come to, of trying whether another medical man might not be more fortunate in his attempt to treat the illness of his daughter.

"I fear Dr. Wade will be offended, say what I like," said he.

"It is quite possible to be too much afraid of giving offence," I said; "but nothing can be more gentle and friendly than the way in which you have communicated the necessity."

"Well, it is a great comfort you think so. Will you go with me to call on Mr. Armstrong?"

"With much pleasure," I answered; and we set out at once.

Shown into the doctor's dining-room, I took a glance at the books lying about. I always take advantage of such an opportunity of gaining immediate insight into character. Let me see a man's book-shelves, especially if they are not extensive, and I fancy I know at once, in some measure, what sort of a man the owner is. One small bookcase in a recess of

the room seemed to contain all the non-professional library of Mr. Armstrong. I am not going to say here what books they were, or what books I like to see; but I was greatly encouraged by the consultation of the auguries afforded by the backs of these. I was still busy with them, when the door opened, and the doctor entered. He was the same man whom I had seen in church looking at Adela. He advanced in a frank manly way to the colonel, and welcomed him by name, though I believe no introduction had ever passed between them. Then the colonel introduced me, and we were soon chatting very comfortably. In his manner, I was glad to find that there was nothing of the professional. I hate the professional. I was delighted to observe, too, that what showed at a distance as a broad honest country face, revealed, on a nearer view, lines of remarkable strength and purity.

"My daughter is very far from well," said the colonel, in answer to a general inquiry.

"So I have been sorry to understand," the doctor rejoined. "Indeed, it is only too clear from her countenance."

"I want you to come and see if you can do her any good."

"Is not Dr. Wade attending her?"

"I have already informed him that I meant to request your advice."

"I shall be most happy to be of any service; but—might I suggest the most likely means of enabling me to judge whether I can be useful or not?"

"Most certainly."

"Then will you give me the opportunity of seeing her in a non-professional way first? I presume, from the fact that she is able to go to church, that she can be seen at home without the formality of an express visit?"

"Certainly," replied the colonel, heartily. "Do me the favour to dine with us this evening, and, as far as that can go,

you will see her—to considerable disadvantage, I fear,” he concluded, smiling sadly.

“Thank you; thank you. If in my power, I shall not fail you. But you must leave a margin for professional contingencies.”

“Of course. That is understood.”

I had been watching Mr. Armstrong during this brief conversation, and the favourable impressions I had already received of him were deepened. His fine manly vigour, and the simple honesty of his countenance, were such as became a healer of men. It seemed altogether more likely that health might flow from such a source, than from the *pudgey*, flabby figure of snuff-taking Dr. Wade, whose face had no expression except a professional one. Mr. Armstrong’s eyes looked you full in yours, as if he was determined to understand you if he could; and there seemed to me, with my foolish way of seeing signs everywhere, something of tenderness about the droop of those long eyelashes, so that his interpretation was not likely to fail from lack of sympathy. Then there was the firm-set mouth of his brother the curate, and a forehead as broad as his, if not so high or so full of modelling. When we had taken our leave, I said to the colonel,—

“If that man’s opportunity has been equal to his qualification, I think we may have great hopes of his success in encountering this unknown disease of poor Adela.”

“God grant it!” was all my friend’s reply.

When he informed Adela that he expected Mr. Henry Armstrong to dinner, she looked at him with a surprised expression, as much as to say, “Surely you do not mean to give me into his hands!” but she only said,—

“Very well, papa.”

So Mr. Armstrong came, and made himself very agreeable at dinner, talking upon all sorts of subjects, and never letting

drop a single word to remind Adela that she was in the presence of a medical man. Nor did he seem to take any notice of her more than was required by ordinary politeness; but behaving without speciality of any sort, he drew his judgments from her general manner, and such glances as fell naturally to his share, of those that must pass between all the persons making up a small dinner-company. This enabled him to see her as she really was, for she remained quite at such ease as her indisposition would permit. He drank no wine at dinner, and only one glass after; and then asked the host if he might go to the drawing-room.

“And will you oblige me by coming with me, Mr. Smith? I can see that you are at home here.”

Of course the colonel consented, and I was at his service. Adela rose from her couch when we entered the room. Mr. Armstrong went up to her gently, and said,—

“Are you able to sing something, Miss Cathcart? I have heard of your singing.”

“I fear not,” she answered; “I have not sung for months.”

“That is a pity. You must loose something by letting yourself get out of practice. May I play something to you, then?”

She gave him a quick glance that indicated some surprise, and said,—

“If you please. It will give me pleasure.”

“May I look at your music first?”

“Certainly.”

He turned over all her loose music from beginning to end. Then without a word seated himself at the grand piano.

Whether he extemporized or played from memory, I, as ignorant of music as of all other accomplishments, could not tell, but even to stupid me, what he did play, spoke. I assure my readers that I hardly know a term in the whole musical

vocabulary; and yet I am tempted to try to describe what this music was like.

In the beginning, I heard nothing but a slow sameness, of which I was soon weary. There was nothing like an air of any kind in it. It seemed as if only his fingers were playing, and his mind had nothing to do with it. It oppressed me with a sense of the common-place, which, of all things, I hate. At length, into the midst of it, came a few notes, like the first chirp of a sleepy bird trying to sing; only the attempt was half a wail, which died away, and came again. Over and over again came these few sad notes, increasing in number, fainting, despairing, and reviving again; till at last, with a fluttering of agonized wings, as of a soul struggling up out of the purgatorial smoke, the music-bird sprang aloft, and broke into a wild but unsure jubilation. Then, as if in the exuberance of its rejoicing it had broken some law of the kingdom of harmony, it sank, plumb-down, into the purifying fires again; where the old wailing and the old struggle began, but with increased vehemence and aspiration. By degrees, the surrounding confusion and distress melted away into forms of harmony, which sustained the mounting cry of longing and prayer. Then all the cry vanished in a jubilant praise. Stronger and broader grew the fundamental harmony, and bore aloft the thanksgiving; which, at length, exhausted by its own utterance, sank peacefully, like a summer sunset, into a grey twilight of calm, with the songs of the summer birds dropping asleep one by one; till, at last, only one was left to sing the sweetest prayer for all, before he, too, tucked his head under his wing, and yielded to the restoring silence.

Then followed a pause. I glanced at Adela. She was quietly weeping.

But he did not leave the instrument yet. A few notes, as of the first distress, awoke; and then a fine manly voice arose

singing the following song, accompanied by something like the same music he had already played. It was the same feelings put into words ; or, at least, something like the same feelings, for I am a poor interpreter of music :

Rejoice, said the sun, I will make thee gay
With glory, and gladness, and holiday ;
I am dumb, O man, and I need thy voice.
But man would not rejoice.

Rejoice in thyself, said he, O sun ;
For thou thy daily course dost run.
In thy lofty place, rejoice if thou can :
For me, I am only a man.

Rejoice, said the wind, I am free and strong ;
I will wake in thy heart an ancient song.
In the bowing woods—hark ! hear my voice !
But man would not rejoice.

Rejoice, O wind, in thy strength, said he,
For thou fulfillest thy destiny.
Shake the trees, and the faint flowers fan :
For me, I am only a man.

I am here, said the night, with moon and star ;
The sun and the wind are gone afar ;
I am here with rest and dreams of choice.
But man would not rejoice.

For he said—What is rest to me, I pray,
Who have done no labour all the day ?
He only should dream who has truth behind.
Alas ! for me and my kind !

Then a voice, that came not from moon nor star,
From the sun, nor the roving wind afar,
Said, Man, I am with thee—rejoice, rejoice !
And man said, I will rejoice !

“A wonderful physician this !” thought I to myself. “He

must be a follower of some of the old mystics of the profession, counting harmony and health all one."

He sat still, for a few moments, before the instrument, perhaps to compose his countenance, and then rose and turned to the company.

The colonel and Percy had entered by this time. The traces of tears were evident on Adela's face, and Percy was eyeing first her and then Armstrong, with some signs of disquietude. Even during dinner it had been clear to me that Percy did not like the doctor, and now he was as evidently jealous of him.

A little general conversation ensued, and the doctor took his leave. The colonel followed him to the door. I would gladly have done so too, but I remained in the drawing-room. All that passed between them was:

"Will you oblige me by calling on Sunday morning, half an hour before church-time, colonel?"

"With pleasure."

"Will you come with me, Smith?" asked my friend, after informing me of the arrangement.

"Don't you think I might be in the way?"

"Not at all. I am getting old and stupid. I should like you to come and take care of me. He won't do Adela any good, I fear."

"Why do you think so?"

"He has a depressing effect on her already. She is sure not to like him. She was crying when I came into the room after dinner."

"Tears are not grief," I answered; "nor only the signs of grief, when they do indicate its presence. They are a relief to it as well. But I cannot help thinking there was some pleasure mingled with those tears, for he had been playing very delightfully. He must be a very gifted man."

"I don't know anything about that. You know I have no ear for music. That won't cure my child, anyhow."

"I don't know," I answered. "It may help."

"Do you mean to say he thinks to cure her by playing the piano to her? If he thinks to come here and do that, he is mistaken."

"You forget, Cathcart, that I have had no more conversation with him than yourself. But surely you have seen no reason to quarrel with him already."

"No, no, my dear fellow. I do believe I am getting a crusty old curmudgeon. I can't bear to see Adela like this."

"Well, I confess, I have hopes from the new doctor; but we will see what he says on Sunday."

"Why should we not have called to-morrow?"

"I can't answer that. I presume he wants time to think about the case."

"And meantime he may break his neck over some gate that he can't or won't open."

"Well, I should be sorry."

"But what's to become of us then?"

"Ah! you allow that? Then you do expect something of him?"

"To be sure I do, only I am afraid of making a fool of myself, and that sets me grumbling at him, I suppose."

Next day was Saturday; and Mrs. Cathcart, Percy's mother, was expected in the evening. I had a long walk in the morning, and after that remained in my own room till dinner-time. I confess I was prejudiced against her; and just because I was prejudiced, I resolved to do all I could to like her, especially as it was Christmas-tide. Not that one time is not as good as another for loving your neighbour, but if ever one is reminded of the duty, it is then. I schooled myself all I could, and went into the drawing-room like a boy trying to be good; as

a means to which end, I put on as pleasant a face as would come. But my good resolutions were sorely tried.

* * * *

These asterisks indicate the obliteration of the personal description which I had given of her. Though true, it was ill-natured. And besides, so indefinite is all description of this kind, that it is quite possible it might be exactly like some woman to whom I am utterly unworthy to hold a candle. So I won't tell what her features were like. I will only say, that I am certain her late husband must have considered her a very fine woman; and that I had an indescribable sensation in the calves of my legs when I came near her. But then, although I believe I am considered a good-natured man, I confess to prejudices (which I commonly refuse to act upon), and to profound dislikes, especially to certain sorts of women, which I can no more help feeling than I can help feeling the misery that permeates the joints of my jaws when I chance to bite into a sour apple. So my opinions about such women go for little or nothing.

When I entered the drawing-room, I saw at once that she had established herself as protectress of Adela, and possibly as mistress of the house. She leaned back in her chair at a considerable angle, but without bending her spine, and her hands lay folded in her lap. She made me a bow with her neck, without in the least altering the angle of her position, while I made her one of my most profound obeisances. A few commonplaces passed between us, and then her brother-in-law leading her to dinner, the evening passed by with politeness on both sides. Adela did not appear to heed her presence one way or the other. But then of late she had been very inexpressive.

Percy seemed to keep out of his mother's way as much as possible. How he amused himself, I cannot imagine.

Next morning we went to call on the doctor, on our way to church.

"Well, Mr. Armstrong, what do you think of my daughter?" asked the colonel.

"I do not think she is in a very bad way. Has she had any disappointment that you know of?"

"None whatever."

"Ah!—I have seen such cases before. There are a good many of them amongst girls at her age. It is as if, without any disease, life were gradually withdrawing itself—ebbing back as it were to its source. Whether this has a physical or a psychological cause, it is impossible to tell. In her case, I think the latter, if indeed it have not a deeper cause; that is, if I am right in my hypothesis. A few days will show me this; and if I am wrong, I will then make a closer examination of her case. At present it is desirable that I should not annoy her in any such way. Now for the practical: my conviction is that the best thing that can be done for her is, to interest her in something, if possible—no matter what it is. Does she take pleasure in anything?"

"She used to be very fond of music. But of late I have not heard her touch the piano."

"May I be allowed to speak?" I asked.

"Most certainly," said both at once.

"I have had a little talk with Miss Cathcart, and I am entirely of Mr. Armstrong's opinion," I said. "And with his permission—I am pretty sure of my old friend's concurrence—I will tell you a plan I have been thinking of. You remember, colonel, how she was more interested in the anecdotes our friends the Bloomfields told the other evening, than she has been in anything else, since I came. It seems to me that the interest she cannot find for herself, we might be able to provide for her, by telling her stories; the course of which

every one should be at liberty to interrupt, for the introduction of any remark whatever. If we once got her interested in anything, it seems to me, as Mr. Armstrong has already hinted, that the tide of life would begin to flow again. She would eat better, and sleep better, and speculate less, and think less about herself—not *of* herself—I don't mean that, colonel; for no one could well think less of herself than she does. And if we could amuse her in that way for a week or two, I think it would give a fair chance to any physical remedies Mr. Armstrong might think proper to try, for they act most rapidly on a system in movement. It would be beginning from the inside, would it not?"

"A capital plan," said the doctor, who had been listening with marked approbation; "and I know one who I am sure would help us. For my part, I never told a story in my life, but I am willing to try—after awhile, that is. My brother, however, would, I know, be delighted to lend his aid to such a scheme, if Colonel Cathcart would be so good as to include him in the conspiracy. It is his duty as well as mine; for she is one of his flock. And he can tell a tale, real or fictitious, better than any one I know."

"There can be no harm in trying it, gentlemen—with kindest thanks to you for your interest in my poor child," said the colonel.

"I confess I have not much hope from such a plan, but—"

"You must not let her know that the thing is got up for her," interrupted the doctor.

"Certainly not. You must all come and dine with us, any day you like. I will call on your brother to-morrow."

"This Christmas-tide gives good opportunity for such a scheme," I said. "It will fall in well with all the festivities; and I am quite willing to open the entertainment with a funny kind of fairy-tale, which has been growing in my brain for some time."

“Capital!” said Mr. Armstrong. “We must have all sorts.”

“Then shall it be Monday at six—that is, to-morrow?” asked the colonel. “Your brother won’t mind a short invitation?”

“Certainly not. Ask him to-day. But I would suggest five, if I might, to give us more time afterwards.”

“Very well. Let it be five. And now we will go to church.”

The ends of the old oak pews next the chancel were curiously carved. One had a ladder and a hammer and nails on it. Another a number of round flat things, and when you counted them you found that there were thirty. Another had a curious thing—I could not tell what, till one day I met an old woman carrying just such a bag. On another was a sponge on the point of a spear. There were more of such carvings; but these I could see from where I sat. And all the sermon was a persuading of the people that God really loved them, without any *if* or *but*.

Adela was very attentive to the clergyman; but I could see her glance wander now and then from his face to that of his brother, who was in the same place he had occupied on Christmas Day. The expression of her aunt’s face was judicial.

When we came out of church, the doctor shook hands with me and said,—

“Can I have a word with you, Mr. Smith?”

“Most gladly,” I answered. “Your time is precious: I will walk your way.”

“Thank you. I like your plan heartily. But to tell the truth, I fancy it is more a case for my brother than for me. But that may come about all in good time, especially as she will now have an opportunity of knowing him. He is the

best fellow in the world. And his wife is as good as he is. But—I feel I may say to you what I could not well say to the colonel—I suspect the cause of her illness is rather a spiritual one. She has evidently a strong mental constitution; and this strong frame, so to speak, has been fed upon slops; and an atrophy is the consequence. My hope in your plan is, partly, that it may furnish a better mental table for her, for the time, and set her foraging in new directions for the future.”

“But how could you tell that from the very little conversation you had with her?”

“It was not the conversation only—I watched everything about her; and interpreted it by what I know about women. I believe that many of them go into a consumption just from discontent—the righteous discontent of a soul which is meant to sit at the Father’s table, and so cannot content itself with the husks which the swine eat. The theological nourishment which is offered them is generally no better than husks. They cannot live upon it, and so die and go home to their Father. And without good spiritual food to keep the spiritual senses healthy and true, they cannot see the things about them as they really are. They cannot find interest in them, because they cannot find their *own* place amongst them. There was one thing though that confirmed me in this idea about Miss Cathcart. I looked over her music on purpose, and I did not find one song that rose above the level of the drawing-room, or one piece of music that seemed likely to have any deep feeling or any thought in it. Of course I judged by the composers.

“You astonish me by the truth and rapidity of your judgments. But how did you, who like myself are a bachelor, come to know so much about the minds of women?”

“I believe in part by reading Milton, and learning from him a certain high notion about myself and my own duty.

None but a man who has tried and is trying to be pure can understand women—I mean the true womanhood that is in them. But more than to Milton am I indebted to that brother of mine you heard preach to-day. If ever God made a good man, he is one. He will tell you himself that he knows what evil is. He drank of the cup, found it full of thirst and bitterness; cast it from him, and turning to the fountain of life, kneeled and drank, and rose up a gracious giant. I say the last—not he. But this brother kept me out of the mire in which he soiled his own garments, though, thank God! they are clean enough now. Forgive my enthusiasm, Mr. Smith, about my brother. He is worthy of it.”

I felt the wind cold to my weak eyes, and did not answer for some time, lest he should draw unfair conclusions.

“You should get him to tell you his story. It is well worth hearing; and as I see we shall be friends all, I would rather you heard it from his own mouth.”

“I sincerely hope I may call that man my friend, some day.”

“You may do so already. He was much taken with you on the journey down.”

“A mutual attraction then, I am happy to think! Good-bye. I am glad you like my plan.”

“I think it excellent. Anything hearty will do her good. Isn’t there a young man somewhere to fall in love with her?”

“I don’t know of any.”

“Only the *best* thing will make her well; but all true things tend to healing.”

“But how is it you have such notions—so different from those of the mass of your professional brethren?”

“Oh!” said he, laughing, “if you really want an answer, be it known to all men that I am a student of Van Helmont.”

He turned away, laughing; and I, knowing nothing of

Van Helmont, could not tell whether he was in jest or in earnest.

At dinner some remark was made about the sermon, I think by our host.

"You don't call that the gospel!" said Mrs. Cathcart, with a smile.

"Why, what do you call it, Jane?"

"I should call it pantheism."

"Might I ask you, madam, what you understand by *pantheism*?" said I.

"Oh! neology, and that sort of thing. It is all the same what you call it."

"And neology is—?"

"Really, Mr. Smith, a dinner-table is not the most suitable place in the world for a theological discussion."

"I quite agree with you, madam," I responded, astonished at my own boldness. I was not quite so much afraid of her after this, although I had an instinctive sense that she did not like me. But Percy was overjoyed to see his mother discomfited, and laughed into his plate. She regarded him with lurid eyes for a moment, and then took refuge in her plate in turn. The colonel was too polite to make any remark at the time, but when he and I were alone, he said,—

"Smith, I didn't expect it of you. Bravo, my boy!"

And I, John Smith, felt myself a hero.

CHAPTER V.

AFTER DINNER.

FIVE o'clock, anxiously expected by me, came, and with it the announcement of dinner. I think those of us who were in the secret would have hurried over it, but with Beeves hanging upon our wheels, we could not. However, at length we were all in the drawing-room, the ladies of the house evidently surprised that we had come up-stairs so soon. Besides the curate, with his wife and brother, our party comprised our old friends, Mr. and Mrs. Bloomfield, whose previous engagement had been advanced by a few days.

When we were all seated, I began, as if it were quite a private suggestion of my own :

"Adela, if you and our friends have no objection, I should like to read you a story I have just scribbled off."

"I shall be delighted, uncle."

This was a stronger expression of content than I had yet heard her once use since I came, and I felt flattered accordingly.

"This is Christmas-time, you know, and just the time for story-telling," I added.

"I trust it is a story suitable to the season," said Mrs. Cathcart, smiling.

"Yes, very," I said ; "for it is a child's story—a fairy tale,

namely ; though I confess I think it fitter for grown than for young children. I hope it is funny, though. I think it is."

"So you approve of fairy-tales for children, Mr. Smith?"

"Not for children alone, madam—for everybody that can relish them."

"And at a specially sacred time like this?"

Again as she spoke she smiled a would-be insinuating smile.

"If I thought God did not approve of fairy-tales, I would never read, not to say write one, Sunday or Saturday. Would you, madam?"

"I never do."

"I beg your pardon for suggesting it. But I must begin."

"Once upon a time," I began, but was unexpectedly interrupted by the clergyman, who said, addressing our host :

"Will you allow me, Colonel Cathcart, to be Master of the Ceremonies for the evening?"

"Certainly, Mr. Armstrong."

"Then I will alter the arrangement of the party. Here, Henry—don't get up, Miss Cathcart—we'll just lift Miss Cathcart's couch to this corner by the fire. Lie still, please. Now, Mr. Smith, you sit here in the middle. Now, Mrs. Cathcart, here is an easy chair for you. With my commanding officer I will not interfere. But having such a jolly fire it was a pity not to get the good of it. Mr. Bloomfield, here is room for you and Mrs. Bloomfield."

"Excellently arranged," said our host. "I will sit by you, Mr. Armstrong. Percy, won't you come and join the circle?"

"No, thank you, uncle," answered Percy from a couch, "I am more comfortable here."

"Now, Lizzie," said the curate to his wife, "you sit on this stool by me. Too near the fire? No? Very well. Harry, put the bottle of water near Mr. Smith. A fellow-feeling for

another fellow—you see, Mr. Smith. Now we're all right, I think ; that is, if Mrs. Cathcart is comfortable."

"Thanks. Quite."

"Then we may begin. Now, Mr. Smith. One word more : anybody may speak that likes. Now, then."

So I did begin—

"Title: THE LIGHT PRINCESS.

"Second Title: A FAIRY-TALE WITHOUT FAIRIES.

"Author: JOHN SMITH, Gentleman.

"Motto:—'*Your Servant, Goody Gravity.*'

"From—SIR CHARLES GRANDISON."

"I must be very stupid, I fear, Mr. Smith ; but to tell the truth, *I* can't make head or tail of it," said Mrs. Cathcart.

"Give me leave, madam," said I ; "that is my office. Allow me, and I hope to make both head and tail of it for you. But let me give you first a more general, and indeed a more applicable motto for my story. It is this—from no worse authority than John Milton :—

Great bards beside
In sage and solemn tunes have sung
Of turneys and of trophies hung ;
Of forests and enchantments drear,
Where more is meant than meets the ear.

"Milton here refers to Spenser in particular, most likely. But what distinguishes the true bard in such work is, that *more is meant than meets the ear* ; and although I am no bard, I should scorn to write anything that only spoke to the *ear*, which signifies the surface understanding."

General silence followed, and I went on to read my story.

Having occasion in the course of it to introduce a christening, Mrs. Cathcart interrupted me.

"One thing," she said, with a still smile, not a very sweet one, but a smile, "one thing I must object to. Can it be right to introduce church ceremonies into a fairy tale?"

"Why, Mrs. Cathcart," answered the clergyman, taking up the cudgels for me, "do you suppose the church to be such a cross-grained old lady, that she will not allow her children to take a few gentle liberties with their mother? She's able to stand that surely! They won't love her the less for it."

"Besides," I ventured to say, "if both church and fairy-tale belong to humanity, they may occasionally cross circles, without injury to either. They must have something in common. There is the "Fairy Queen" and the "Pilgrim's Progress," you know, Mrs. Cathcart. I can fancy the pope even telling his nephews a fairy tale."

"Ah, the pope! I daresay."

"And not the archbishop?"

"I don't think your reasoning quite correct, Mr. Smith," said the clergyman; "and I think, moreover, there is a real objection to that scene. It is, that no such charm could have had any effect where holy water was employed as the medium. In fact I doubt if the wickedness could have been wrought in a chapel at all."

"I submit," I said. "You are right. I hold up the four paws of my mind, and crave indulgence."

"In the name of the church, having vindicated her power over evil incantations, I permit you to proceed," said Mr. Armstrong, his black eyes twinkling with fun.

Mrs. Cathcart smiled once more, but shook her head.

The next who interrupted me was the clergyman. "Now really," he said, "I must protest, Mr. Smith; you bury us under an avalanche of puns, and not always very good ones. Now the story, though humorous, is not the kind to admit of such false embellishment. It reminds one of a burlesque

at a theatre—the lowest thing, from a literary point of view, that has yet been discovered.”

“I submit,” was all I could answer, for I feared he was right; and I now publish the story, cutting out a great many of the puns. The passage as it now stands is not nearly so bad as it was then, though, I confess, it is still bad enough.

“I think,” said Mrs. Armstrong, since criticism is the order of the evening, and Mr. Smith is so kind as not to mind it, he makes the king and queen too silly. It takes away from the reality.”

“Right, too, my dear madam,” I answered.

“The reality of a fairy tale?” said Mrs. Cathcart, as if asking a question of herself.

“But will you grant me the justice,” said I, “to temper your judgments of me, if not of my story, by remembering that this is the first thing of the sort I ever attempted.”

“I tell you what,” said the doctor, “it’s very easy to criticize, but none of you could have written it yourself.”

“Of course not, for my part,” said the clergyman.

Silence followed; and I resumed. The next to interrupt was the doctor.

“I am not sure about your physics, Mr. Smith,” he said. “If she had no gravity, no amount of muscular propulsion could have given her any momentum. And again, if she had no gravity, she must inevitably have ascended beyond the regions of the atmosphere.”

“Bottle your philosophy, Harry, with the rest of your physics,” said the clergyman, laughing. “Don’t you see that she must have had some weight, only it wasn’t worth mentioning, being no greater than the ordinary weight of the atmosphere. Besides, you know very well that a law of nature could not be destroyed. Therefore it was only witchcraft, you know, and the laws of that remain to be discovered, at least so

far as my knowledge goes. Mr. Smith, you have gone in for a fairy tale ; and if I were you, I would claim the immunity of Fairy-land."

"So I do," I responded fiercely, and went on.

By-and-by—

"All that is very improper—to my mind," said Mrs. Cathcart. And she glanced towards the place where Percy had deposited himself, as if she were afraid of her boy's morals.

But if she was anxious on that score her fears must have been dispersed the same moment by an indubitable snore from the youth, who was in his favourite position—at full length on the couch.

"You must remember all this is in Fairyland, aunt," said Adela, with a smile. "Nobody does what papa and mamma would not like here. We must not judge the people in fairy-tales by precisely the same conventionalities we have. They must be good after their own fashion."

"Conventionalities ! Humph !" said Mrs. Cathcart.

"Besides, I don't think the princess was quite accountable," said I.

"You should have made her so, then," rejoined my critic.

"Oh ! wait a little, madam," I replied.

"I think," said the clergyman, "that Miss Cathcart's defence is tolerably sufficient ; and, in my character of Master of the Ceremonies, I order Mr. Smith to proceed."

I made haste to do so before Mrs. Cathcart could open a new battery.

As I finished, came an outburst of remarks.

"Bravo !"

"Capital !"

"Very good indeed !"

"Quite a success !"—cried my complimentary friends.

"I don't think the princess could have rowed, though, without gravity, you know," said the schoolmaster.

"But she did," said Adela. "I won't have my uncle found fault with. It is a very funny and a very pretty story."

"What is the moral of it?" drawled Mrs. Cathcart, with the first syllable of *moral* very long and unaccented.

"That you need not be afraid of ill-natured aunts, though they are witches," said Adela.

"No, my dear; that's not it," I said. "It is, that you need not mind forgetting your poor relations. No harm will come of it in the end."

"I think the moral is," said the doctor, "that no girl is worth anything till she has cried a little."

Adela gave him a quick glance, and then cast her eyes down. Whether he had looked at her I don't know. But I should think not. Neither the clergyman nor his wife had made any remark. I turned to them.

"I am afraid you do not approve of my poor story," I said.

"On the contrary," replied Mr. Armstrong, "I think there is a great deal of meaning in it, to those who can see through its fairy-gates. What do you think of it, my dear?"

"I was so pleased with the earnest parts of it, that the fun jarred upon me a little, I confess," said Mrs. Armstrong. "But I dare say that was silly."

"I think it was, my dear. But you can afford to be silly sometimes, in a good cause."

"You might have given us the wedding," said Mrs. Bloomfield.

"I am an old bachelor, you see. I fear I don't give weddings their due," I answered. "I don't care for them—in stories, I mean."

"When will you dine with us again?" asked the colonel.

"When you please," answered the curate.

"To-morrow, then?"

"Rather too soon that, is it not? Who is to read the next story?"

"Why, you, of course," answered his brother.

"I am at your service," rejoined Mr. Armstrong. "But to-morrow!"

"Don't you think, Ralph," said his wife, "you could read better if you followed your usual custom of dining early?"

"I am sure I should, Lizzie. Don't you think, Colonel Cathcart, it would be better to come in the evening, just after your dinner? I like to dine early, and I am a great tea-drinker. If we might have a huge tea-kettle on the fire, and tea-pot to correspond on the table, and I, as I read my story, and the rest of the company, as they listen, might help ourselves, I think it would be very jolly, and very homely."

To this the colonel readily agreed. I heard the ladies whispering a little, and the words—"Very considerate indeed!" from Mrs. Bloomfield, reached my ears. Indeed I had thought that the colonel's hospitality was making him forget his servants. And I could not help laughing to think what Beeves's face would have been like, if he had heard us all invited to dinner again, the next day.

Whether Adela suspected us now, I do not know. She said nothing to show it.

Just before the doctor left with his brother and sister, he went up to her, and said, in a by-the-bye sort of way:

"I am sorry to hear that you have not been quite well of late, Miss Cathcart. You have been catching cold, I am afraid. Let me feel your pulse."

She gave him her wrist directly, saying:

"I feel much better to-night, thank you."

He stood—listening to the pulse, you would have said—his whole attitude was so entirely that of one listening, with his

eyes doing nothing at all. He stood thus for a while, without consulting his watch, looking as if the pulse had brought him into immediate communication with the troubled heart itself, and he could feel every flutter and effort which it made. Then he took out his watch and counted.

Now that his eyes were quite safe, I saw Adela's eyes steal up to his face, and rest there for half a minute with a reposeful expression. I felt that there was something healing in the very presence and touch of the man—so full was he of health and humanity; and I thought Adela felt that he was a good man, and one to be trusted in.

He gave her back her hand, as it were, so gently did he let it go, and said:

"I will send you something as soon as I get home, to take at once. I presume you will go to bed soon?"

"I will, if you think it best."

And so Mr. Henry Armstrong was, without more ado, tacitly installed as physician to Miss Adela Cathcart; and she seemed quite content with the new arrangement.

CHAPTER VI.

AGAIN.

BEFORE the next meeting took place, namely, after breakfast on the following morning, Percy having gone to visit the dogs, Mrs. Cathcart addressed me :

“I had something to say to my brother, Mr. Smith, but—”

“And you wish to be alone with him? With all my heart,” I said.

“Not at all, Mr. Smith,” she answered, with one of her smiles, which were quite incomprehensible to me, until I hit upon the theory that she kept a stock of them for general use, as stingy old ladies save up their half-worn ribbons to make presents of them to servant-maids; “I only wanted to know, before I made a remark to the colonel, whether Dr. Armstrong—”

“Mr. Armstrong lays no claim to the rank of a physician.”

“So much the better for my argument. But he is a friend of yours, Mr. Smith?”

“Yes—of almost a week’s standing.”

“Oh, then, I am in no danger of hurting your feelings.”

“I don’t know that,” thought I, but did not say it.

“Well, Colonel Cathcart—excuse the liberty I am taking—but surely you do not mean to dismiss Dr. Wade, and give a

young man like that the charge of your daughter's health at such a crisis ? ”

“ Dr. Wade is dismissed already, Jane. He did her no more good than any old woman might have done.”

“ But such a young man ! ”

“ Not so very young,” I ventured to say. “ He is thirty at least.”

But the colonel was angry with her interference ; for, an impetuous man always, he had become irritable of late.

“ Jane,” he said, “ is a man less likely to be delicate because he is young ? Or does a man always become more refined as he grows older ? For my part—” and here his opposition to his unpleasant sister-in-law possibly made him say more than he would otherwise have conceded—“ I have never seen a young man whose manners and behaviour I liked better.”

“ Much good that will do her ! It will only hasten the mischief. You men are so slow to take a hint, brother ; and it is really too hard to be forced to explain one's self always. Don't you see that, whether he cures her or not, he will make her fall in love with him ? And you won't relish that, fancy.”

“ You won't relish it, at all events. But mayn't he fall in love with her as well ? ” thought I ; which thought, a certain expression in the colonel's face kept me from uttering. I saw at once that his sister's words had set a discord in the good man's music ; Mrs. Cathcart saw that her arrow had gone to the feather ; and I saw what she tried to conceal—the flash of success on her face. But she presently extinguished it, and rising left the room. I thought with myself that the arrangement suggested would be the very best thing for Adela ; and that, if the blessedness of woman lies in any way in the possession of true manhood, she, let her position in society be what it might compared with his, and let her have all the earls

in the kingdom for uncles, would be a fortunate woman indeed to gain such a man as Harry Armstrong;—for so much was I attracted to the man, that I already called him Harry, when I and Myself talked about him. But I was concerned to see my old friend so much disturbed. I hoped however that his good generous heart would soon right its own jarring chords, and that he would not spoil a chance of Adela's recovery, however slight, by any hasty measures founded on nothing safer than paternal jealousy. I thought, indeed, he had gone too far to make any change possible for a while at least, but I did not know how far his internal discomfort might act upon his behaviour as host, and interfere with the homeliness of our story-club, upon which I depended not a little for a portion of result.

The motive of Mrs. Cathcart's opposition was evident. She was a partisan of Percy; for Adela was a very tolerable fortune, as people say.

These thoughts went through my mind, as thoughts do, in no time at all; and when the lady had closed the door behind her with protracted gentleness, I was ready to show my game; in which I really considered my friend and myself partners.

“Those women,” I said (women forgive me!), with a laugh which I trust the colonel did not discover to be a forced one—“Those women are always thinking about falling in love and that sort of foolery! I wonder she isn't jealous of me now! Don't I love Adela better than any man can—for some weeks to come? Haven't I been a sweetheart of hers ever since she was in long clothes?” Here I tried to laugh again, and, to judge from the colonel, verily think I succeeded. The cloud lightened on his face, as I made light of its cause, till at last he laughed too. If I thought it all nonsense, why should he think it earnest? So I turned the conversation to

our club, which concerned me more than the love-making at present, seeing the latter had no existence as yet.

"Adela seemed quite to enjoy the reading last night," I said.

"I thought she looked very grave," he answered.

The good man had been watching her face all the time, and paying no heed to the story. I doubted if he was the better judge for this—observing only *ab extra*, and without being in *rapproch* with her feelings as operated on by the tale.

"Now that is just what I should have wished to see," I answered. "We don't want her merry all at once. What we want is, that she should take an interest in something. A grave face is a sign of interest. It is all the world better than a listless face."

"But what good can stories do in sickness?"

"That depends on the origin of the sickness. My assurance is, that, near or far off, in ourselves, or in our ancestors—say Adam and Eve, for comprehension's sake—all our ailments have a moral cause. I think that if we were all good, disease must, in the course of generations, disappear utterly from the face of the earth."

"That's one of your notions, old friend! It's very fine, no doubt, but *rather* peculiar. Mystical, is it not?"

"But, I meant to go on to say, in Adela's case, I believe from the little conversation I have had with her, that the operation of mind on body is far more immediate than that I have hinted at."

"You cannot mean to imply," said my friend, in some alarm, "that Adela has anything upon her conscience?"

"Certainly not. But there may be moral disease that does not in the least imply personal wrong or fault. It may be transmitted, for instance. But if it sprang wholly from present physical causes, any help given to the mind would react on

those causes. Yet more would the physical evil be influenced through the mind if the mind were the source of it.

"Now, from whatever cause, Adela is in a kind of moral atrophy, for she cannot digest the food provided for her, so as to get the good of it. Suppose a patient in a corresponding physical condition should show an inclination for anything suggested to him, would you not take it for a sign that that was just the thing to do him good? We may accept what interest Adela shows in any kind of mental pabulum provided for her, as an analogous sign. It corresponds to relish, and is a ground for expecting some benefit to follow—in a word, some nourishment of the spiritual life. Relish may be called the digestion of the palate; interest, the digestion of the inner ears; both significant of further digestion to follow. The food thus relished may not be the best food; and yet it may be the best for the patient, because she feels no repugnance to it, and can assimilate as well as swallow it. For my part, I do not believe in cramming, bodily or mental. I think nothing learned without interest can be of the slightest after benefit; and although the effort may comprise a moral good, it involves considerable intellectual injury. All I have said applies with still greater force to religious teaching, though that is not definitely the question now."

"Well, Smith, I can't talk philosophy like you; but what you say sounds like sense. At all events, if Adela enjoys it, that is enough for me. Will the young doctor tell stories too?"

"I don't know. I fancy he *could*. But to-night we have his brother."

"I shall make them welcome, anyhow."

This was all I wanted of him; and now I was impatient for the evening, and the clergyman's tale. The more I saw of him the better I liked him, and felt the more interest in him. I

went to church that same morning, and heard him read prayers, and liked him better still ; so that I was quite hungry for the story he was going to read to us.

The evening came, and with it the company. Arrangements, similar to those of the evening before, having been made, with some little improvements, the colonel now occupying the middle place in the half-circle, and the doctor seated, whether by chance or design, at the corner farthest from the invalid's couch, the clergyman, rolling and unrolling the manuscript in his hand, said :

“To explain how I came to write a story the scene of which is in Scotland, I may be allowed to inform the company that I spent a good part of my boyhood in a town in Aberdeenshire with my grandfather, who was a thorough Scotchman. He had removed thither from the south, where the name is indigenous; being indeed a descendant of that Christy whom his father, Johnny Armstrang, standing with the rope about his neck, ready to be hanged—or murdered, as the ballad calls it, apostrophizes in these words :

‘ And God be with thee, Christy, my son,
Where thou sits on thy nurse's knee !
But an' thou live this hundred year,
Thy father's better thou'lt never be.’

I beg your pardon, ladies and gentlemen all, for this has positively nothing to do with the story. Only please to remember that in those days it was quite respectable to be hanged.”

We all agreed with a profusion of assent, except the colonel, who, I thought, winced a little. But presently our attention was occupied with the story, thus announced :

“*The Bell. A Sketch in Pen and Ink.*”

He read in a great, deep, musical voice, with a profound

pathos in it—always suppressed, yet too much for me in the more touching portions of the story.

“One interruption more,” he said, before he began. “I fear you will find it a sad story.”

And he looked at Adela.

I believe he had chosen it on the homœopathic principle.

“I like sad stories,” she answered ; and he went on at once.

When he ended, for a full minute there was silence in the little company. I myself dared not look up, but the movement of indistinct and cloudy white over my undirected eyes, let me know that two or three, amongst them Adela, were lifting their handkerchiefs to their faces. At length a voice broke the silence.

“How much of your affecting tale is true, Mr. Armstrong?”

The voice belonged to Mrs. Cathcart.

“I object to the question,” said I. “I don’t want to know. Suppose, Mrs. Cathcart, we’re to put this story-club, members, stories, and all, into a book, how would any lady like to have her real existence questioned? It would at least imply that I had made a very bad portrait of her.”

The lady cast rather a frightened look at me, which I confess I was not sorry to see. But the curate interposed :

“What fearful sophistry, Mr. Smith!” Then turning to Mrs. Cathcart, he continued :

“I have not the slightest objection to answer your question, Mrs. Cathcart ; and if Mr. Smith does not want to hear the answer, I will wait till he has put his fingers in his ears.”

He glanced towards me, his black eyes twinkling with fun. It was all he could do to keep from winking ; but he did.

“Oh no,” I answered ; “I will share what is going.”

“Well, then, the fool is a real character, in every point. But I learned after the sketch was written, that I had made one mistake. He was in reality about seventeen, when he was

found on the hill. The bell is a real character too. The *wow* was the fool's own name for it; and Ruthven, pronounced *Rivven*, is a parish in that region. There is a rhyme well known there:

The road to the kirk o' Rivven,
Whaur gang mair dead nor livin'.

Elsie is a creature of my own. So of course are the brother and the dog."

"I don't know whether to be glad or sorry there was no Elsie," said his wife. "But did you know the fool yourself?"

"Perfectly well, and had a great respect for him. I was, when a little boy, quite proud of the way he behaved to me. He visited occasionally the general persecution of the boys, upon any boy who chanced to meet him on the road; but as often as I met him, he walked quietly past me, only muttered 'Auntie's folk!' or returned my greeting of 'A fine day, Colonel!' with a grunted 'Ay.'"

"What did he mean by 'Auntie's folk'?" asked Mrs. Armstrong.

"My grandmother was kind to him, and he always called her Auntie. I cannot tell how the fancy originated; but certainly he knew all her descendants somehow—a degree of intelligence not to have been expected of him—and invariably murmured 'Auntie's folk' as often as he passed any of them on the road, as if to remind himself that these were friends, or relations. Possibly he had lived with an aunt before he was exposed on the moor."

"Is *wow* a word at all?" I asked.

"If you look into Jamieson's Dictionary," said Armstrong, "as I have done for the express purpose, you will find that the word is used differently in different quarters of the country—chiefly, however, as a verb. It means *to bark*, *to howl*; likewise

to wave or beckon ; also *to woo*, or *make love to*. Any of these might be given as an explanation of his word. But I do not think it was closely related to any of them ; nor was the word used, in that district, in either of the last two senses, in my time at least. It was used, however, in the meaning of *alas!*—a form of *woe* in fact ; as *wow's me!* But in the poor vocabulary of the fool it was, I believe, just an imitation of the sound the bell made. If you repeat the word several times, resting on the final *w*, and pausing between each repetition—*wow ! wow ! wow !*—you will find the sound not at all unlike the tolling of a funeral bell ; and therefore the word is most probably an onomatopoetic invention of the fool's own."

Adela offered no remark upon the story, and I knew from her countenance that she was too much affected to be inclined to speak. Her eyes had that fixed, forward look, which, combined with haziness, indicates deep emotion, while the curves of her mouth were nearly straightened out by the compression of her lips. I had thought, while the reader went on, that she could hardly fail to find in the story of Elsie some correspondence to her own condition and necessities : I now believed she had found that correspondence. More talk was not desirable ; and I was glad when, after a few attempts at ordinary conversation, Mr. and Mrs. Bloomfield rose to take their leave, which was accepted by the whole company as a signal for departure.

"But stay," I interposed ; "who is to read or tell next ?"

"The doctor ought to come after the clergyman," said our host.

"I am afraid I have nothing to give you," said the doctor. "I don't say I won't read. In fact I have a story in my head, and a bit of it on paper ; but I can't read next time."

"Will you oblige us with a story, colonel ?" said I.

"My dear fellow, you know I never put pen to paper in my life, except when I could not help it. I may tell you one before all is over, but write one I cannot."

"A tale that is told is the best tale of all," I said. "Shall we book you for next time?"

"No, no! not next time; positively not. My story must come of itself, else I cannot tell it at all."

"Then there's nobody left but you, Mr. Bloomfield."

"I never wrote anything worth calling a story; but I don't mind reading you something of the sort I have at home—on one condition."

"What is that?"

"That nobody ask any questions about it."

"Oh! certainly," said the colonel.

"But my only reason is that it would all come to pieces if you did. It is nothing as a story; but there are feelings expressed in it, which were very strong when I wrote it, and which I do not feel willing to talk about, though I should like to have them thought about."

"Well, that is settled. When shall we meet again?" said I.

"To-morrow, or the day after," suggested the colonel; "—which you please."

"Oh! the day after, if I may have a word in the matter," said the doctor. "I shall be very busy to-morrow—and we mustn't crowd remedies, either, you know."

The close of the sentence was addressed to me only. The others had taken leave, and were already at the door, when he made the last remark. He now turned to his patient, felt her pulse, and put the question,—

"How have you slept the last two nights?"

"Better, thank you."

"And do you feel refreshed when you wake?"

"More so than for some time."

"I won't give you anything to-night. Good night."

"Good night. Thank you."

This was all that passed between them. Jealousy, with the six eyes of Colonel, Mrs., and Percy Cathcart, was intent upon the pair during the brief conversation. And I thought Adela perceived the fact.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SCHOOLMASTER'S STORY.

I WAS walking up the street the next day, when, finding I was passing the Grammar-school, and knowing there was nothing going on there now, I thought I should not be intruding if I dropped in upon the schoolmaster and his wife, and had a little chat with them. I already counted them friends ; for I felt that however different our training and lives might have been, we all meant the same thing now, and that is the true bond of fellowship. I found Mr. Bloomfield reading to his wife—a novel, too. Evidently he intended to make the most of this individual holiday, by making it as unlike a work-day as possible.

“I see you are enjoying yourselves,” I said. “It’s a shame to break in upon you.”

“We are delighted to see you. Your interruption will only postpone a good thing to a better,” said the kind-hearted schoolmaster, laying down his book. “Will you take a pipe ?”

“With pleasure—but not here, surely ?”

“Oh ! we smoke everywhere in holiday-time.”

“You enjoy your holiday, I can see.”

“I should think so. I don’t believe one of the boys delights in a holiday quite as heartily as I do. You must not imagine I don’t enjoy my work, though.”

"Not in the least. Earnest work breeds earnest play. But you must find the labour wearisome at times."

"I confess I have felt it such. I have said to myself sometimes: 'Am I to go on for ever teaching boys Latin grammar, till I wish there had never been a Latin nation to leave such an incubus upon the bosom of after ages?' Then I would remind myself, that, under cover of grammar and geography, and all the other *farce-meat* (as the word *ought* to be written and pronounced), I put something better into my pupils; something that I loved myself, and cared to give to them. But I often ask myself to what it all goes. I learn to love my boys. I kill in them all the bad I can. I nourish in them all the good I can. I send them across the borders of manhood—and they leave me, and most likely I hear nothing more of them. And I say to myself: 'My life is like a wind. It blows and will cease.' But something says in reply: 'Wouldst thou not be one of God's winds, content to blow, and scatter the rain and dew, and shake the plants into fresh life, and then pass away and know nothing of what thou hast done?' And I answer: 'Yes, Lord.'"

"You are not a wind; you are a poet, Mr. Bloomfield," I said with emotion.

"One of the speechless ones, then," he returned, with a smile that showed plainly enough that the speechless longed for utterance. It was such a smile as would, upon the face of a child, wile anything out of you. Surely God, who needs no wiles to make him give what one is ready to receive, will let him sing some day to his heart's content! And me, too, O Lord, I pray.

"What a pleasure it must be to you now, to have such a man as Mr. Armstrong for your curate! He will be a brother to you," I said, as soon as I could speak.

"Mr. Smith, I cannot tell you what he is to me already.

He is doing what I would fain have done—what was denied to me.”

“How do you mean?”

“I studied for the church. But I aimed too high. My heart burned within me, but my powers were small. I wanted to re-light the ancient lamp, but my rush-light would not kindle it. My friends saw no light; they only smelt burning: I was heterodox. I hesitated, I feared, I yielded, I withdrew. To this day I do not know whether I did right or wrong. But I am honoured yet in being allowed to teach. And if at the last I have the faintest ‘Well done’ from the Master, I shall be satisfied.”

Mrs. Bloomfield was gently weeping; partly from regret, as I judged, that her husband was not in the position she would have given him, partly from delight in his manly goodness. A watery film stood in the schoolmaster’s eyes, and his wise, gentle face was irradiated with the light of a far-off morning, whose dawn was visible to his hope.

“The world is the better for you at least, Mr. Bloomfield,” I said. “I wish some more of us were as sure as you of helping on the daily Creation, which is quite as certain a fact as that of old; and is even more important to us than that recorded in the book of Genesis. It is not great battles alone that build up the world’s history, nor great poems alone that make the generations grow. There is a still, small rain from heaven that has more to do with the blessedness of nature and of human nature, than the mightiest earthquake, or the loveliest rainbow.”

“I do comfort myself,” he answered, “at this Christmas-time, and for the whole year, with the thought that, after all, the world was saved by a child. But, Mr. Smith, the only paper I have, at all fit for reading to-morrow night, is much too short to occupy the evening. What is to be done?”

"Oh! we can talk about it."

"But, you remember, that was just what I begged should not be done. I could not bear it. The composition is rather an odd one, I fear; but, worthy or not, I cannot help having a great affection for it."

"Then it is true, I presume?"

"There again! That is just one of the questions I don't want to answer. I quite sympathized with you last night in not wishing to know how much of Mr. Armstrong's story was true. Even if wholly fictitious, a good story is always true. But there are things which one would have no right to invent, which would be worth nothing if they were invented, from the very circumstance of their origin in the brain, and not in the world. The very beauty and seeming importance of them demands that they should be fact; and, if not fact, that they should not be told—sent out poor unclothed spirits into the world before a material body has been prepared for them! I find it impossible to describe the sort of things I have in my mind's eye. The nearest I can come to defining saying what I mean is this: if the force of the lesson depends on the story being a fact, it must not be told except it is a fact. Then again, there are true things that one would be shy of telling, if he thought they would be attributed to himself. Now this story of mine is made up of fiction and fact both. And I fear that if I were called upon to take it to pieces, it would lose the force of any little truth it possesses, besides exposing me to what I would gladly avoid. Indeed, I fear I ought not to read it at all."

"You are amongst friends, you know, Mr. Bloomfield."

"Entirely?" he asked, with a half comic expression.

"Well," I answered, laughing, "any exception that may exist, is hardly worth considering, and indeed ought to be thankfully accepted, as tending to wholesomeness. Neither

vinegar nor mustard would be desirable as food, you know, yet—”

“I understand you. I am ashamed of having made such a fuss about nothing. I will do my best, I assure you.”

I fear that the fastidiousness of the good man will not be excuse enough for the introduction of such a long preamble to a story for which only a few will in the least care. But the said preamble happening to touch on some interesting subjects, I thought it well to record it. As to the story itself, there are some remarks of Balzac in the introduction to one of his, that would well apply to the schoolmaster's. They are to the effect that some stories which have nothing in them as stories, yet fill one with an interest both gentle and profound, if they are read in the mood that is exactly fitted for their reception.

Mr. Bloomfield conducted me to the door.

“I hope you will not think me a grumbler,” he said; “I should not like your disapprobation, Mr. Smith.”

“You do me great honour,” I said, honestly. “Believe me there is no danger of that. I understand and sympathize with you entirely.”

“My love of approbation is large,” he said, tapping the bump referred to with his forefinger. “Excuse it and me too.”

“There is no need, my dear friend,” I said, “if I may call you such.”

His answer was a warm squeeze of the hand, with which we parted.

As I returned home, I met Henry Armstrong, mounted on a bay mare of a far different kind from one a sportsman would consider a doctor justified in using for his purposes. In fact she was a thorough hunter; no beauty certainly, with her ewe-neck, drooping tail, and white face and stocking; but she had an eye at once gentle and wild as that of a savage angel, if my

reader will condescend to dream for a moment of such an anomaly ; while her hind-quarters were power itself, and her fore-leg was flung right out from the shoulder with a gesture not of work but of delight ; the step itself being entirely one of work,—long in proportion to its height. The lines of her fore and hind-quarters converged so much, that there was hardly more than room for the saddle between them. I had never seen such action. Altogether, although not much of a hunting man, the motion of the creature gave me such a sense of power and joy, that I longed to be scouring the fields with her under me. It was a sunshiny day, with a keen cold air, and a thin sprinkling of snow ; and Harry looked so radiant with health, that one could easily believe he had health to convey, if not to bestow. He stopped and inquired after his patient.

“ Could you not get her to go out with you, Mr. Smith ? ” he said.

“ Would that be safe, Mr. Henry ? ”

“ Perfectly safe, if she is willing to go ; not otherwise. Get her to go willingly for ten minutes, and see if she is not the better for it. What I want is to make the blood go quicker and more plentifully through her brain. She has not fever enough. She does not live fast enough.”

“ I will try,” I said. “ Have you been far to-day ? ”

“ Just come out. You might tell that by the mare. You should see her three hours after this.”

And he patted her neck as if he loved her—as I am sure he did—and trotted gently away.

When I came up to the gate, Beeves was standing at it.

“ A nice gentleman that, sir ! ” said he.

“ He is, Beeves. I quite agree with you.”

“ And rides a good mare, sir ; and rides as well as any man in the county. I never see him leave home in a hurry. Always

goes gently out, and comes gently in. What has gone between, you may see by her skin when she comes home."

"Does he hunt, Beeves?"

"I believe not, sir; except the fox crosses him in one of his rounds. Then if he is heading anywhere in his direction, they say doctor and mare go at it like mad. He's got two more in his stable, better horses to look at; but that's the one to go."

"I wonder how he affords such animals."

"They say he has a way of buying them lame, and a wonderful knack of setting them up again. They all go, anyhow."

"Will you say to your mistress, that I should like very much if she would come to me here."

Beeves stared, but said, "Yes, sir," and went in. I was now standing in front of the house, doubtful of the reception Adela would give my message, but judging that curiosity would aid my desire. I was right. Beeves came back with the message that his mistress would join me in a few minutes. In a quarter of an hour she came, wrapt in furs. She was very pale, but her eye was brighter than usual, and it did not shrink from the cold glitter of the snow. She put her arm in mine, and we walked for ten minutes along the dry gravel walks, chatting cheerfully, about anything and nothing.

"Now you must go in," I said.

"Not yet, surely, uncle. By-the-bye, do you think it was right of me to come out?"

"Mr. Henry Armstrong said you might."

She did not reply, but I thought a slight rose-colour tinged her cheek.

"But he said you must not be out more than ten minutes."

"Well, I suppose I must do as I am told."

And she turned at once, and went up the stair to the door, almost as lightly as any other girl of her age.

There was some progress, plainly enough. But was that a rose-tinge I had seen on her cheek or not ?

The next evening, after tea, we arranged ourselves much as on the last occasion ; and Mr. Bloomfield, taking a neat manuscript from his pocket, and evidently restraining himself from apology and explanation, although as evidently nervous about the whole proceeding, and jealous of his own presumption, began to read as follows.

His voice trembled as he read, and his wife's face was a shade or two paler than usual.

“BIRTH, DREAMING, AND DEATH.

“In a little room, scantily furnished, lighted, not from the window, for it was dark without, and the shutters were closed, but from the peaked flame of a small, clear-burning lamp, sat a young man, with his back to the lamp and his face to the fire. No book or paper on the table indicated labour just forsaken ; nor could one tell from his eyes, in which the light had all retreated inwards, whether his consciousness was absorbed in thought, or reverie only. The window curtains, which scarcely concealed the shutters, were of coarse texture, but of brilliant scarlet—for he loved bright colours ; and the faint reflection they threw on his pale, thin face, made it look more delicate than it would have seemed in pure daylight. Two or three bookshelves, suspended by cords from a nail in the wall, contained a collection of books, poverty-stricken as to numbers, with but few to fill up the chronological gap between the Greek New Testament and stray volumes of the poets of the present century. But his love for the souls of his individual books was the stronger that there was no possibility of its degenerating into avarice for the bodies or outsides whose aggregate constitutes the piece of house-furniture called a library.

“Some years before, the young man (my story is so short, and calls in so few personages, that I need not give him a name) had aspired, under the influence of religious and sympathetic feeling, to be a clergyman; but Providence, either in the form of poverty, or of theological difficulty, had prevented his prosecuting his studies to that end. And now he was only a village schoolmaster, nor likely to advance further. I have said *only* a village schoolmaster; but is it not better to be a teacher *of* babes than a preacher *to* men, at any time; not to speak of those troublous times of transition, wherein a difference of degree must so often assume the appearance of a difference of kind? That man is more happy—I will not say more blessed—who, loving boys and girls, is loved and revered by them, than he who, ministering unto men and women, is compelled to pour his words into the filter of religious suspicion, whence the water is allowed to pass away unheeded, and only the residuum is retained for the analysis of ignorant party-spirit.

“He had married a simple village girl, in whose eyes he was nobler than the noblest—to whom he was the mirror, in which the real forms of all things around were reflected. Who dares pity my poor village schoolmaster? I fling his pity away. Had he not found in her love the verdict of God, that he was worth loving? Did he not in her possess the eternal and the unchangeable? Were not her eyes openings through which he looked into the great depths that could not be measured or represented? She was his public, his society, his critic. He found in her the heaven of his rest. God gave unto him immortality, and he was glad. For his ambition, it had died of its own mortality. He read the words of Jesus, and the words of great prophets whom he has sent; and learned that the wind-tossed anemone is a word of God as real and true as the unbending oak beneath which it grows—that reality is an

absolute existence precluding degrees. If his mind was, as his room, scantily furnished, it was yet lofty ; if his light was small, it was brilliant. God lived, and he lived. Perhaps the highest moral height which a man can reach, and at the same time the most difficult of attainment, is the willingness to be *nothing* relatively, so that he attain that positive excellence which the original conditions of his being render not merely possible, but imperative. It is nothing to a man to be greater or less than another—to be esteemed or otherwise by the public or private world in which he moves. Does he, or does he not, behold and love and live the unchangeable, the essential, the divine ? This he can only do according as God has made him. He can behold and understand God in the least degree, as well as in the greatest, only by the godlike within him ; and he that loves thus the good and great has no room, no thought, no necessity for comparison and difference. The truth satisfies him. He lives in its absoluteness. God makes the glow-worm as well as the star ; the light in both is divine. If mine be an earth-star to gladden the wayside, I must cultivate humbly and rejoicingly its green earth-glow, and not seek to blanch it to the whiteness of the stars that lie in the fields of blue. For to deny God in my own being is to cease to behold him in any. God and man can meet only by the man's becoming that which God meant him to be. Then he enters into the house of life, which is greater than the house of fame. It is better to be a child in a green field, than a knight of many orders in a state ceremonial.

“ All night long he had sat there, and morning was drawing nigh. He has not heard the busy wind all night, heaping up snow against the house, which will make him start at the ghostly face of the world when at length he opens the shutters, and it stares upon him so white. For up in a little room above, white-curtained, like the great earth without, there has

been a storm, too, half the night—moanings and prayers—and some forbidden tears ; but now, at length, it is over ; and through the portals of two mouths instead of one, flows and ebbs the tide of the great air-sea which feeds the life of man. With the sorrow of the mother, the new life is purchased for the child ; our very being is redeemed from nothingness with the pains of a death of which we know nothing.

“An hour has gone by since the watcher below has been delivered from the fear and doubt that held him. He has seen the mother and the child—the first she has given to life and him—and has returned to his lonely room, quiet and glad.

“But not long did he sit thus before thoughts of doubt awoke in his mind. He remembered his scanty income, and the somewhat feeble health of his wife. One or two small debts he had contracted, seemed absolutely to press on his bosom ; and the new-born child—‘oh ! how doubly welcome,’ he thought, ‘if I were but half as rich again as I am !’—brought with it, as its own love, so its own care. The dog of need, that so often hunt us up to heaven, seemed hard upon his heels ; and he prayed to God with fervour ; and as he prayed he fell asleep in his chair, and as he slept he dreamed. The fire and the lamp burned on as before, but threw no rays into his soul ; yet now, for the first time, he seemed to become aware of the storm without ; for his dream was as follows :—

“He lay in his bed, and listened to the howling of the wintry wind. He trembled at the thought of the pitiless cold, and turned to sleep again, when he thought he heard a feeble knocking at the door. He rose in haste, and went down with a light. As he opened the door, the wind, entering with a gust of frosty particles, blew out his candle ; but he found it unnecessary, for the grey dawn had come. Looking out, he

saw nothing at first; but a second look, turned downwards, showed him a little half-frozen child, who looked quietly, but beseechingly, in his face. His hair was filled with drifted snow, and his little hands and cheeks were blue with cold. The heart of the schoolmaster swelled to bursting with the spring-flood of love and pity that rose up within it. He lifted the child to his bosom, and carried him into the house; where, in the dream's incongruity, he found a fire blazing in the room in which he now slept. The child said never a word. He set him by the fire, and made haste to get hot water, and put him in a warm bath. He never doubted that this was a stray orphan who had wandered to him for protection, and he felt that he could not part with him again; even though the train of his previous troubles and doubts once more passed through the mind of the dreamer, and there seemed no answer to his perplexities for the lack of that cheap thing, gold—yea, silver. But when he had undressed and bathed the little orphan, and having dried him on his knees, set him down to reach something warm to wrap him in, the boy suddenly looked up in his face, as if revived, and said with a heavenly smile, 'I am the child Jesus.' 'The child Jesus!' said the dreamer, astonished. 'Thou art like any other child.' 'No, do not say so,' returned the boy; 'but say, *Any other child is like me.*' And the child and the dream slowly faded away; and he awoke with these words sounding in his heart—'Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me; and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.' It was the voice of God saying to him: 'Thou wouldst receive the child whom I sent thee out of the cold, stormy night; receive the new child out of the cold waste into the warm human house, as the door by which it can enter God's house, its home. If better could be done for it, or for thee, would I have sent it hither? Through thy love, my little

one must learn my love and be blessed. And thou shalt not keep it without thy reward. For thy necessities—in thy little house, is there not yet room? in thy barrel, is there not yet meal? and thy purse is not empty quite. Thou canst not eat more than a mouthful at once. I have made thee so. Is it any trouble to me to take care of thee? Only I prefer to feed thee from my own hand, and not from thy store.’ And the schoolmaster sprang up in joy, ran upstairs, kissed his wife, and clasped the baby in his arms in the name of the child Jesus. And in that embrace, he knew that he received God to his heart. Soon, with a tender, beaming face, he was wading through the snow to the school-house, where he spent a happy day amidst the rosy faces and bright eyes of his boys and girls. These, likewise, he loved the more dearly and joyfully for that dream, and those words in his heart; so that, amidst their true child-faces (all going well with them, as not unfrequently happened in his schoolroom), he felt as if all the elements of Paradise were gathered around him, and knew that he was God’s child, doing God’s work.

“But while that dream was passing through the soul of the husband, another visited the wife, as she lay in the faintness and trembling joy of the new motherhood. For although she that has been mother before, is not the less a new mother to the new child, her former relation not covering with its wings the fresh bird in the nest of her bosom, yet there must be a peculiar delight in the thoughts and feelings that come with the first-born. As she lay half in a sleep, half in a faint, with the vapours of a gentle delirium floating through her brain, without losing the sense of existence she lost the consciousness of its form, and thought she lay, not a young mother in her bed, but a nosegay of wild flowers in a basket, crushed, flattened and half-withered. With her in the basket lay other bunches of flowers, whose odours, some rare as well as rich, revealed

to her the sad contrast in which she was placed. Beside her lay a cluster of delicately curved, faintly tinged, tea-scented roses ; while she was only blue hyacinth bells, pale primroses, amethyst anemones, closed blood-coloured daisies, purple violets, and one sweet-scented, pure white orchis. The basket lay on the counter of a well-known little shop in the village, waiting for purchasers. By-and-by her own husband entered the shop, and approached the basket to choose a nosegay. ' Ah ! ' thought she, ' will he choose me ? How dreadful if he should not, and I should be left lying here, while he takes another ! But how should he choose me ? They all are so beautiful ; and even my scent is nearly gone. And he cannot know that it is I lying here. Alas ! alas ! ' But as she thought thus, she felt his hand clasp her, heard the ransom-money fall, and felt that she was pressed to his face and lips, as he passed from the shop. He *had* chosen her ; he *had* known her. She opened her eyes : her husband's kiss had awakened her. She did not speak, but looked up thankfully in his eyes, as if he had, in fact, like one of the old knights, delivered her from the transformation of some evil magic, by the counter-enchantment of a kiss, and restored her from a half-withered nosegay to be a woman, a wife, a mother. The dream comforted her much, for she had often feared that she, the simple, so-called uneducated girl, could not be enough for the great schoolmaster. But soon her thoughts flowed into another channel ; the tears rose in her dark eyes, shining clear from beneath a stream that was not of sorrow ; and it was only weakness that kept her from uttering audible words like these :—' Father in heaven, shall I trust my husband's love, and doubt thine ? Wilt thou meet less richly the fearing hope of thy child's heart, than he in my dream met the longing of his wife's ? He was perfected in my eyes by the love he bore me—shall I find thee less complete ? Here I lie on thy world, faint, and

crushed, and withered ; and my soul often seems as if it had lost all the odours that should float up in the sweet-smelling savour of thankfulness and love to thee. But thou hast only to take me, only to choose me, only to clasp me to Thy bosom, and I shall be a beautiful singing angel, singing to God, and comforting my husband while I sing. Father, take me, possess me, fill me !’

“So she lay patiently waiting for the summer-time of restored strength that drew slowly nigh. With her husband and her child near her, in her soul, and God everywhere, there was for her no death, and no hurt. When she said to herself, ‘How rich I am !’ it was with the riches that pass not away—the riches of the Son of man ; for in her treasures, the human and the divine were blended—were one.

“But there was a hard trial in store for them. They had learned to receive what the Father sent : they had now to learn that what he gave he gave eternally, after his own being—his own glory. For ere the mother awoke from her first sleep, the baby, like a frolicsome child-angel, that but tapped at his mother’s window and fled—the baby died ; died while the mother slept away the pangs of its birth ; died while the father was teaching other babes out of the joy of his new fatherhood.

“When the mother woke, she lay still in her joy—the joy of a doubled life ; and knew not that death had been there, and had left behind only the little human coffin.

“‘Nurse, bring me the baby,’ she said at last. ‘I want to see it.’

“But the nurse pretended not to hear.

“‘I want to nurse it. Bring it.’

“She had not yet learned to say *him* ; for it was her first baby.

“But the nurse went out of the room, and remained some

minutes away. When she returned, the mother spoke more absolutely, and the nurse was compelled to reply—at last.

“ ‘Nurse, do bring me the baby; I am quite able to nurse it now.’

“ ‘Not yet, if you please, ma’am. Really you must rest a while first. Do try to go to sleep.’

“The nurse spoke steadily, and looked her too straight in the face; and there was a constraint in her voice, a determination to be calm, that at once roused the suspicion of the mother; for though her first-born was dead, and she had given birth to what was now, as far as the eye could reach, the waxen image of a son, a child had come from God, and had departed to him again; and she *was* his mother.

“And the fear fell upon her heart that it might be as it was; and, looking at her attendant with a face blanched yet more with fear than with suffering, she said,—

“ ‘Nurse, is the baby ——?’

“She could not say *dead*; for to utter the word would be at once to make it possible that the only fruit of her labour had been pain and sorrow.

“But the nurse saw that further concealment was impossible; and, without another word, went and fetched the husband, who, with face pale as the mother’s, brought the baby, dressed in its white clothes, and laid it by its mother’s side, where it lay too still.

“ ‘Oh, ma’am, do not take on so,’ said the nurse, as she saw the face of the mother grow like the face of the child, as if she were about to rush after him into the dark.

“But she was not ‘taking on’ at all. She only felt that pain at her heart, which is the farewell kiss of a long-cherished joy. Though cast out of paradise into a world that looked very dull and weary, yet, used to suffering, and always claiming from God the consolation it needed, and satisfied with that,

she was able, presently, to look up in her husband's face, and try to reassure him of her well-being by a dreary smile.

“‘Leave the baby,’ she said; and they left it where it was. Long and earnestly she gazed on the perfect tiny features of the little alabaster countenance, and tried to feel that this was the child she had been so long waiting for. As she looked, she fancied she heard it breathe, and she thought—‘What if it should be only asleep!’ but, alas! the eyes would not open, and when she drew it close to her, she shivered to feel it so cold. At length, as her eyes wandered over and over the little face, a look of her husband dawned unexpectedly upon it; and, as if the wife's heart awoke the mother's, she cried out, ‘Baby! baby!’ and burst into tears, during which weeping she fell asleep.

“When she awoke, she found the babe had been removed while she slept. But the unsatisfied heart of the mother longed to look again on the form of the child; and again, though with remonstrance from the nurse, it was laid beside her. All day and all night long, it remained by her side, like a little frozen thing that had wandered from its home, and now lay dead by the door.

Next morning the nurse protested that she must part with it, for it made her fret; but she knew it quieted her, and she would rather keep her little lifeless babe. At length the nurse appealed to the father; and the mother feared he would think it necessary to remove it; but to her joy and gratitude he said, ‘No, no; let her keep it as long as she likes.’ And she loved her husband the more for that; for he understood her.

“Then she had the cradle brought near the bed, all ready as it was for a live child that had open eyes, and therefore needed sleep—needed the lids of the brain to close, when it was filled full of the strange colours and forms of the new world. But this one needed no cradle, for it slept on. It

needed, instead of the little curtains to darken it to sleep, a great sunlight to wake it up from the darkness, and the ever-satisfied rest. Yet she laid it in the cradle, which she had set near her, where she could see it, with the little hand and arm laid out on the white coverlet. If she could only keep it so! Could not something be done, if not to awake it, yet to turn it to stone, and let it remain so for ever? No; the body must go back to its mother, the earth, and the *form* which is immortal, being the thought of God, must go back to its Father, the Maker. And as it lay in the white cradle, a white coffin was being made for it. And the mother thought: 'I wonder which trees are growing coffins for my husband and me.'

"But ere the child, that had the prayer of Job in his grief, and had died from its mother's womb, was carried away to be buried, the mother prayed over it this prayer:—'O God, if thou wilt not let me be a mother, I have one refuge: I will go back and be a child: I will be thy child more than ever. My mother-heart will find relief in childhood towards its Father. For is it not the same nature that makes the true mother and the true child? Is it not the same thought blossoming upward and blossoming downward? So there is God the Father and God the Son. Thou wilt keep my little son for me. He has gone home to be nursed for me. And when I grow well, I will be more simple, and truthful, and joyful in thy sight. And now Thou art taking away my child, my plaything, from me. But I think how pleased I should be, if I had a daughter, and she loved me so well that she only smiled when I took her plaything from her. Oh! I will not disappoint thee—thou shalt have thy joy. Here I am, do with me what thou wilt; I will only smile.'

"And how fared the heart of the father? At first, in the bitterness of his grief, he called the loss of his child a punishment for his doubt and unbelief; and the feeling of

punishment made the stroke more keen, and the heart less willing to endure it. But better thoughts woke within him ere long.

“The old woman who swept out his schoolroom came in the evening to inquire after the mistress, and to offer her condolences on the loss of the baby. She came likewise to tell the news, that a certain old man of little respectability had departed at last, unregretted by a single soul in the village but herself, who had been his nurse through the last tedious illness.

“The schoolmaster thought with himself:

“‘Can that soiled and withered leaf of a man, and my little snow-flake of a baby, have gone the same road? Will they meet by the way? Can they talk about the same thing—anything? They must part on the borders of the shining land, and they could hardly speak by the way.’

“‘He will live four-and-twenty hours, nurse,’ the doctor had said.

“‘No, doctor; he will die to-night,’ the nurse had replied; during which whispered dialogue, the patient had lain breathing quietly, for the last of suffering was nearly over.

He was at the close of an ill-spent life, not so much selfishly towards others as indulgently towards himself. He had failed of true joy by trying often and perseveringly to create a false one; and now, about to knock at the gate of the other world, he bore with him no burden of the good things of this; and one might be tempted to say of him, that it were better he had not been born. The great majestic mystery lay before him—but when would he see its majesty?

“He was dying thus, because he had tried to live as Nature said he should not live; and he had taken his own wages—for the law of the Maker is the necessity of his creature. His own children had forsaken him, for they were not perfect as their

Father in heaven, who maketh his sun to shine on the evil and on the good. Instead of doubling their care as his need doubled, they had thought of the disgrace he brought on them, and not of the duty they owed him; and now, left to die alone for them, he was waited on by this hired nurse, who, familiar with death-beds, knew better than the doctor—knew that he could live only a few hours.

“Stooping to his ear, she had told him, as gently as she could—for she thought she ought not to conceal it—that he must die that night. He had lain silent for a few moments; then had called her, and, with broken and failing voice, had said, ‘Nurse, you are the only friend I have: give me one kiss before I die.’ And the woman-heart had answered the prayer.

“‘And,’ said the old woman, ‘he put his arms round my neck, and gave me a long kiss, such a long kiss! and then he turned his face away, and never spoke again.’

“So, with the last unction of a woman’s kiss, with this baptism for the dead, he had departed.

“‘Poor old man! he had not quite destroyed his heart yet,’ thought the schoolmaster. ‘Surely it was the child-nature that woke in him at the last, when the only thing left for his soul to desire, the only thing he could think of as a preparation for the dread something, was a kiss. Strange conjunction, yet simple and natural! Eternity—a kiss. Kiss me; for I am going to the Unknown! Poor old man!’ the schoolmaster went on in his thoughts, ‘I hope my baby has met him, and put his tiny hand in the poor old shaking hand, and so led him across the borders into the shining land, and up to where Jesus sits, and said to the Lord: “Lord, forgive this old man, for he knew not what he did.” And I trust the Lord has forgiven him.’

“And then the bereaved father fell on his knees, and cried out:—

“‘Lord, thou hast not punished me. Thou wouldst not punish for a passing thought of troubled unbelief, with which I strove. Lord, take my child and his mother and me, and do what thou wilt with us. I know thou givest not, to take again.’

“And ere the schoolmaster could call his protestantism to his aid, he had ended his prayer with the cry :

“‘And O God ! have mercy upon the poor old man, and lay not his sins to his charge.’

“For, though a woman’s kiss may comfort a man to eternity, it is not all he needs. And the thought of his lost child had made the soul of the father compassionate.”

He ceased, and we sat silent.

CHAPTER VIII.

SONG.

I CONFESS I was *a little* dismayed to find what a more than solemn turn the club-stories had taken. But this dismay lasted for a moment only; for I saw that Adela was deeply interested, again wearing the look that indicates abstracted thought and feeling. I said to myself:

“This is very different mental fare from what you have been used to, Adela.”

But she seemed able to mark, learn, and inwardly digest it, for she had the appearance of one who is stilled by the strange newness of her thoughts. I was certain she was now experiencing a consciousness of existence quite different from anything she had known before. But it had a curious outcome.

For, when the silence began to grow painful, no one daring to ask a question, and Mrs. Cathcart had resumed her knitting, Adela suddenly rose, and going to the piano, struck a few chords, and began to sing. The song was one of Heine's strange, ghost-dreams, so unreal in everything but feeling, and therefore, as dreams, so true. Why did she choose such a song after what we had been listening to? I accounted for it by the supposition that, being but poorly provided as far as variety in music went, this was the only thing suggested to her by the tone of the paper, and, therefore, the nearest she could

come to it. It served, however, to make a change and a transition.

This was what she sang; and the singing of it was evidently a relief to her :—

I dreamt of the daughter of a king,
With a cheek white, wet, and chill;
Under the limes we sat murmuring,
And holding each other so still!

“Oh! not thy father’s sceptre of gold,
Nor yet his shining throne,
Nor his diamond crown that glitters cold—
’Tis thyself I want, my own!”

“Oh! that is too good,” she answer’d me;
“I lie in the grave all day;
And only at night I come to thee,
For I cannot keep away.”

It was something that she had volunteered a song, whatever it was. But it is a misfortune that, in writing a book, one cannot give the music of a song. Perhaps, by the time that music has its fair part in education, this may be done. But, meantime, we mention the fact of a song, and then give the words, as if that were the song. The music is the song, and the words are no more than the saddle on which the music sits, the singer being the horse, who could do without a saddle well enough. May Adela forgive the comparison! At the same time, a true word-song has music of its own, and is quite independent, for its music, both of that which it may beget, and of that with which it may be associated.

As she rose, she glanced towards the doctor, and said,—
“Now it is your turn, Mr. Armstrong.”

Harry did not wait for a second invitation; for to sing was to him evidently a pleasure too great to be put in jeopardy. He rose at once, and sitting down at the instrument, sang—I

cannot say *as follows*, you see ; I can only say *the following words* :—

Autumn clouds are flying, flying,
O'er the waste of blue ;
Summer flowers are dying, dying,
Late so lovely new.
Labouring wains are slowly rolling
Home with winter grain ;
Holy bells are slowly tolling
Over buried men.

Goldener lights set noon a-sleeping
Like an afternoon ;
Colder airs come stealing, creeping
After sun and moon ;
And the leaves, all tired of blowing
Cloudlike o'er the sun,
Change to sunset-colours, knowing
That their day is done.

Autumn's sun is sinking, sinking
Into Winter's night ;
And our hearts are thinking, thinking
Of the cold and blight.
Our life's sun is slowly going
Down the hill of might ;
Will our clouds shine golden-glowing
On the slope of night ?

But the vanish'd corn is lying
In rich golden glooms.
In the churchyard, all the sighing
Is above the tombs.
Spring will come, slow-lingering,
Opening buds of faith.
Man goes forth to meet his spring,
Through the door of death.

So we love, with no less loving,
Hair that turns to grey ;
Or a step less lightly moving
In life's autumn day.

And if thought, still-brooding, lingers
 O'er each bygone thing,
 'Tis because old Autumn's fingers
 Paint in hues of Spring.

The whole tone of this song was practical and true, and so was fitted to correct the unhealthiness of imagination which might have been suspected in the choice of the preceding. "Words and music," I said to myself, "must here have come from the same hand; for they are one utterance. There is no setting of words to music here; but the words have brought their own music with them; and the music has brought its own words."

As Harry rose from the pianoforte, he said to me gaily:

"Now, Mr. Smith, it is your turn. I know when you sing it will be something worth listening to."

"Indeed, I hope so," I answered. "But the song-hour has not yet come to me. How good you all ought to be who can sing! I feel as if my heart would break with delight, if I could sing; and yet there is not a sparrow on the housetop that cannot sing a better song than I."

"Your hour will come," said the clergyman, solemnly. "Then you will sing, and all we shall listen. There is no inborn longing that shall not be fulfilled. I think that is as certain as the forgiveness of sins. Meantime, while your singing-robcs are making, I will take your place with my song, if Miss Cathcart will allow me."

"Do, please," said Adela, very heartily; "we shall all be delighted."

The clergyman sang, and sang even better than his brother. And these were the words of his song:—

THE MOTHER MARY TO THE INFANT JESUS.

'Tis time to sleep, my little boy;
 Why gaze thy bright eyes so?
 At night, earth's children, for new joy,
 Home to thy Father go.

But thou art wakeful. Sleep, my child ;
The moon and stars are gone ;
The wind and snow they grow more wild,
And thou art smiling on.

My child, thou hast immortal eyes,
That see by their own light ;
They see the innocent blood—it lies
Red-glowing through the night.
Through wind and storm unto thine ear
Cry after cry doth run ;
And yet thou seemest not to hear,
And only smilest on.

When first thou camest to the earth,
All sounds of strife were still ;
A silence lay around thy birth,
And thou didst sleep thy fill.
Why sleep'st thou—nay, why weeps't thou not ?
Thy earth is woe-begone ;
Babies and mothers wail their lot,
And still thou smilest on.

I read thine eyes like holy book ;
No strife is pictured there ;
Upon thy face I see the look
Of one who answers prayer.
Ah, yes !—thine eyes, beyond this wild,
Behold God's will well done ;
Men's songs thine ears are hearing, child ;
And so thou smilest on.

The prodigals arise and go,
And God goes forth to meet ;
Thou seest them gather, weeping low,
About the Father's feet.
And for their brothers men must bear,
Till all are homeward gone.
O Eyes, ye see my answer'd prayer !
Smile, Son of God, smile on.

As soon as the vibrations of this song, I do not mean on

the chords of the instrument, but in the echo-caves of our bosoms, had ceased, I turned to the doctor and said,—

“Are you ready with your story yet, Mr. Henry?”

“Oh, dear no!” he answered—“not for days. I am not an idle man like you, Mr. Smith. I belong to the labouring class.”

I knew that he could not have it ready.

“Well,” I said, “if our friends have no objection, I will give you another myself next time.”

“Oh! thank you, uncle,” said Adela. “Another fairy tale, please.”

“I can’t promise you another fairy-tale just yet, but I can promise you something equally absurd, if that will do.”

“Oh yes! Anything you like, uncle. I, for one, am sure to like what you like.”

“Thank you, my dear. Now I will go, for I see the doctor waiting to have a word with you.”

The company took their leave, and the doctor was not two minutes behind them; for as I went up to my room, after asking the curate when I might call upon him, I saw him come out of the drawing-room and go downstairs.

“Monday evening, then,” I had heard the colonel say, as he followed his guests to the hall.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CURATE AND HIS WIFE.

As I approached the door of the little house in which the curate had so lately taken up his abode, he saw me from the window, and before I had had time to knock, he had opened the door.

"Come in," he said. "I saw you coming. Come to my den, and we will have a pipe together."

"I have brought some of my favourite cigars," I said, "and I want you to try them."

"With all my heart."

The room to which he led me was small, but disfigured with no offensive tidiness. Not a spot of wall was to be seen for books, and yet there were not many books after all. We sat for some minutes enjoying the fragrance of the western incense, without other communion than that of the clouds we were blowing, and what I gathered from the walls. For I am old enough, as I have already confessed, to be getting long-sighted, and I made use of the gift in reading the names of the curate's books, as I had read those of his brother's. They were mostly books of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with a large admixture from the nineteenth, and more than the usual proportion of the German classics ; though, strange to say, not a single volume of German theology could I discover. The curate was the first to break the silence.

"I find this a very painful cigar," he said, with a half laugh.

"I am sorry you don't like it. Try another."

"The cigar is magnificent."

"Isn't it thoroughfare, then?"

"Oh yes! the cigar's all right. I haven't smoked such a cigar for more than ten years; and that's the reason."

"I wish I had known you seven years, Mr. Armstrong."

"You have known me a hundred and seven."

"Then I have a right to—"

"Poke my fire as much as you please."

And as Mr. Armstrong said so, he poked his own chest, to signify the symbolism of his words.

"Then I should like to know something of your early history—something to account for the fact that a man like you, at your time of life, is only a curate."

"I can do all that, and account for the pain your cigar gives me, in one and the same story."

I sat full of expectation.

"You won't find me long-winded, I hope."

"No fear of that. Begin directly. I adjure you by our friendship of a hundred years."

"My father was a clergyman before me; one of those simple-hearted men who think that to be good and kind is the first step towards doing God's work; but who are too modest, too ignorant, and sometimes too indolent to aspire to any second step, or even to inquire what the second step may be. The poor in his parish loved him and preyed upon him. He gave and gave, even after he had no more that he had a right to give.

"He was not by any means a rich man, although he had a little property besides his benefice; but he managed to send me to Oxford. Inheriting, as I suspect, a little tendency to extravagance; having at least no love of money except for what it would bring; and seeing how easily money might be

raised there for need true or false, I gradually learned to think less and less of the burdens grievous to be borne, which a subjection to Mammon will accumulate on the shoulders of the unsuspecting ass. I think the old man of the sea in "Sinbad the Sailor," must personify debt. At least *I* have found reason to think so. At the same time I wish I had done nothing worse than run into debt. Yet by far the greater part of it was incurred for the sake of having works of art about me. Of course pictures were out of the question; but good engravings and casts were within the reach of a borrower. At least it was not for the sake of whip-handles and trousers, that I fell into the clutches of Moses Melchizedek, for that was the name of the devil to whom I betrayed my soul for money. Emulation, however, mingled with the love of art; and I must confess, too, that cigars cost me money as well as pictures; and, as I have already hinted, there was worse behind. But some things we can only speak to God about.

"I shall never forget the oily face of the villain—may God save him, and then he'll be no villain!—as he first hinted that he would lend me any money I might want, upon certain insignificant conditions, such as signing for a hundred and fifty, where I should receive only a hundred. The sunrise of the future glowed so golden, that it seemed to me the easiest thing in the world to pay my debts *there*. Here, there was what I wanted, cigars and all. There, there must be gold, else whence the hue? I could pay all my debts in the future, with the utmost ease. *How* was no matter. I borrowed and borrowed. I flattered myself, besides, that in the things I bought I held money's worth; which, in the main, would have been true, if I had been a dealer in such things; but a mere owner can seldom get the worth of what he possesses, especially when he cannot choose but sell, and has no choice of his market. So when, horrified at last with the filth of the

refuge into which I had run to escape the bare walls of heaven, I sold off everything but a few of my pet books"—here he glanced lovingly round his humble study, where shone no glories of print or cast—"which I ought to have sold as well, I found myself still a thousand pounds in debt.

"Now although I had never had a thousand pounds from Melchizedek, I had known perfectly well what I was about. I had been deluded, but not cheated; and in my deep I saw yet a lower depth, into which I *would* not fall—for then I felt I should be lost indeed—that of in any way repudiating my debts. But what was to be done I had no idea.

"I had studied for the church, and I now took holy orders. I had a few pounds a year from my mother's property, which all went in part-payment of the interest on my debt. I dared not trouble my father with any communication on the subject, of my embarrassment, for I knew that he could not help me, and that the impossibility of doing so would make him more unhappy than the wrong I had done in involving myself. I seized the first offer of a curacy that presented itself. Its emoluments were just one hundred pounds a year, of which I had *not* to return twenty pounds, as some curates have had to do. Out of this I had to pay one half, in interest for the thousand pounds. On the other half, and the trifle my mother allowed me, I contrived to live.

"But the debt continued undiminished. It lay upon me as a mountain might crush a little Titan. There was no cracking frost, no cutting stream to wear away, by slowest trituration, that mountain of folly and wickedness. But what I suffered most from was the fact, that I must seem to the poor of my parish unsympathetic and unkind. For although I still managed to give away a little, it seemed to me such a small, shabby sum, every time that I drew my hand from my pocket, in which perhaps I had left still less, that it was with a positive feeling of shame

that I offered it. There was no high generosity in this. It was mostly selfish—the effect of the transmission of my father's blind benevolence, working as an impulse in me. But it made me wretched. Add to this a feeling of hypocrisy, in the knowledge that I, the dispenser of sacred things to the people, was myself the slave of a money-lending Jew, and you will easily see how my life could not be to me the reality which it must be, for any true and healthy action, to every man. In a word, I felt that I was a humbug. As to my preaching, that could not have had much reality in it of any kind, for I had no experience yet of the relation of Christian Faith to Christian Action. In fact, I regarded them as separable—not merely as distinguishable, in the necessity which our human nature, itself an analysis of the divine, has for analyzing itself. I respected everything connected with my profession, which I regarded as in itself eminently respectable; but, then, it was only the profession I respected, and I was only 'doing church' at best. I have since altered my opinion about the profession, as such; and while I love my work with all my heart, I do not care to think about its worldly relations at all. The honour is to be a servant of men, whom God thought worth making, worth allowing to sin, and worth helping out of it at such a cost. But as far as regards the 'profession,' is it a manly kind of work, to put on a white gown once a week, and read out of a book; and then put on a black gown, and read out of a paper you bought or wrote; all about certain old time-honoured legends which have some influence in keeping the common people on their good behaviour, by promising them happiness after they are dead, if they are respectable, and everlasting torture if they are blackguards? Is it manly?"

"You are scarcely fair to the profession even as such, Mr. Armstrong," I said.

"That's what I *feel* about it," he answered. "Look here," he went on, holding out a brawny right arm, with muscles like

a prize-fighter's, "they may laugh at what, by a happy hit, they have called muscular christianity—I for one don't object to being laughed at—but I ask you, is that work fit for a man to whom God has given an arm like that? I declare to you, Smith, I would rather work in the docks, and leave the churching to the softs and dandies; for then I should be able to respect myself as giving work for my bread, instead of drawing so many pounds a year for talking goody to old wives and sentimental young ladies;—for over men who are worth anything, such a man has no influence. God forbid that I should be disrespectful to old women, or even sentimental young ladies! They are worth serving with a man's whole heart, but not worth pampering. I am speaking of the profession as professed by a mere clergyman—one in whom the professional predominates."

"But you can't use those splendid muscles of yours in the church."

"But I can give up the use of them for something better and nobler. They indicate work; but if I can do real spiritual instead of corporeal work, I rise in the scale. I sacrifice my thews on the altar of my faith. But by the mere clergyman, there is no work done to correspond—I do not say to his capacity for work—but to the capacity for work indicated by such a frame as mine—work of some sort, if not of the higher poetic order, then of the lower porter-sort. But if there be a living God, who is doing all he can to save men, to make them pure and noble and high, humble and loving and true, to make them live the life he cares to live himself; if he has revealed and is revealing this to men, and needs for his purpose the work of their fellow-men, who have already seen and known this purpose, surely there is no nobler office than that of a parson; for to him is committed the grand work of letting men see the thoughts of God, and the work of God—in a word,

of telling the story of Jesus, so that men shall see how true it is for *now*, how beautiful it is for ever ; and recognize it as in fact *the* story of God. Then a clergyman has simply to be more of a man than other men ; whereas if he be but a clergyman, he is less of a man than any other man who does honestly the work he has to do, whether he be farm-labourer, shoemaker, or shopkeeper. For such a work, a man may well pine in a dungeon, or starve in a curacy ; yea, for such a work, a man will endure the burden of having to dispense the wealth of a bishopric after a divine fashion."

"But your story?" I said at last, unwilling as I was to interrupt his eloquence.

"Yes. This brings me back to it. Here was I starving for no high principle, only for the commonplace one of paying my debts ; and paying my debts out of the church's money too, for which, scanty as it was, I gave wretched labour—reading prayers as neatly as I could, and preaching sermons half evangelical, half scholastic, of the most unreal and uninteresting sort ; feeling all the time hypocritical, as I have already said ; and without the farthest prospect of deliverance.

"Then I fell in love."

"Worse and worse !"

"So it seemed ; but so it wasn't--like a great many things. At all events, she's down stairs now, busy at a baby's frock, I believe ; God bless her ! Lizzie is the daughter of a lieutenant in the army, who died before I knew her. She was living with her mother and elder sister, on a very scanty income, in the village where I had the good fortune to be the unhappy curate. I believe I was too unhappy to make myself agreeable to the few young ladies of my congregation, which is generally considered one of the first duties of a curate, in order, no doubt, to secure their co-operation in his charitable schemes ; and certainly I do not think I received any great attention from

them—certainly not from Lizzie. I thought she pitied and rather despised me. I don't know whether she did, but I still suspect it. I am thankful to say I have no ground for thinking she does now. But we have been through a kind of moderate burning fiery furnace together, and that brings out the sense, and burns out the nonsense, in both men and women. Not that Lizzie had much nonsense to be burned out of her, as you will soon see.

“I had often been fool enough to wonder that, while she was most attentive and devout during the reading of the service, her face assumed, during the sermon, a far-off look of abstraction, that indicated no reception of what I said, further than as an influence of soporific quality. I felt that there was reproof in this. In fact, it roused my conscience yet more, and made me doubt whether there was anything genuine in me at all. Sometimes I felt as if I really could not go on, but must shut up my poor manuscript, which was ‘an ill-favoured thing, sir, but mine own,’ and come down from the pulpit, and beg Miss Lizzie Payton’s pardon for presuming to read it in her presence. At length that something, or rather want of something, in her quiet unregarding eyes, aroused a certain opposition, ambition, indignation in me. I strove to write better, and to do better generally. Every good sentence, I launched at her—I don’t quite know whether I aimed at her heart or her head—I fear the latter; but I know that I looked after my arrow with a hurried glance, to see whether it had reached the mark. Seldom, however, did I find that my bow had had the strength to arouse Miss Lizzie from the somnolent condition which, in my bitterness, I attributed to her. Since then I have frequently tried to bring home to her the charge, and wring from her the confession that, occasionally, just occasionally, she was really overpowered by—the weather. But she has never admitted more than one such lapse, which,

happening in a hard frost, and the church being no warmer than condescension, she wickedly remarked must have been owing, not to the weight of the atmosphere, but the weight of something else. At length, in my anxiety for self-justification, I persuaded myself that her behaviour was a sign of spiritual insensibility; that she needed conversion; that she looked with contempt from the far-off table-lands of the Broad church, or the dizzy pinnacles of snow-clad Puseyism, upon the humble efforts of one who followed in the footsteps of the first fishers of men—for such I tried, in my self-protection, to consider myself.

“One day, I happened to meet her in a retired lane near the village. She was carrying a jug in her hand.

“‘How do you do, Miss Lizzie? A labour of love?’ I said, ass that I was!

“‘Yes,’ she answered; ‘I’ve been over to Farmer Dale’s, to fetch some cream for mamma’s tea.’

“She knew well enough I had meant a ministration to the poor.

“‘Oh! I beg your pardon,’ I rejoined; ‘I thought you had been round your district.’

“This was wicked; for I knew quite well that she had no district.

“‘No,’ she answered, ‘I leave that to my sister. Mamma is my district. And do you know, her headaches are as painful as any washerwoman’s.’

“This shut me up rather; but I plucked up courage presently.

“‘You don’t seem to like going to church, Miss Lizzie.’

“Her face flushed.

“‘Who dares to say so? I am very regular in my attendance.’

“‘Not a doubt of it. But you don’t enjoy being there.’

“‘I do.’

“‘Confess, now.—You don’t like my sermons.’

“‘Do you like them yourself, Mr. Armstrong?’

“‘Here was a floorer! Did I like them myself?—I really couldn’t honestly say I did. I was not greatly interested in them, further than as they were my own, and my best attempts to say something about something I knew nothing about. I was silent. She stood looking at me out of clear grey eyes.

“‘Now you have begun this conversation, Mr. Armstrong, I will go on with it,’ she said, at length. ‘It was not of my seeking.—I do not think you believe what you say in the pulpit.’

“‘Not believe what I said! Did I believe what I said? Or did I only believe that it was to be believed? The tables were turned with a vengeance. Here was the lay lamb, attacked and about to be worried by the wolf clerical, turning and driving the said wolf to bay. I stood and felt like a convicted criminal before the grey eyes of my judge. And somehow or other I did not hate those clear pools of light. They were very beautiful. But not one word could I find to say for myself. I stood and looked at her, and I fear I began to twitch at my neckcloth, with a vague instinct that I had better go and hang myself. I stared and stared, and no doubt got as red as a turkey-cock—till it began to be very embarrassing indeed. What refuge could there be from one who spoke the truth so plainly? And how do you think I got out of it?’” asked Mr. Armstrong of me, John Smith, who, as he told the story, felt almost in as great confusion and misery as the narrator must have been in at the time, although now he looked amazingly jolly, and breathed away at his cigar with the slow exhalations of an epicure.

“‘Mortal cannot tell,” I answered.

"One mortal can," rejoined he, with a laugh.—"I fell on my knees, and made speechless love to her."

Here came a pause. The countenance of the broad-churchman changed as if a lovely summer cloud had passed over it. The jolly air vanished, and he looked very solemn for a little while.

"There was no coxcombry in it, Smith. I may say that for myself. It was the simplest and truest thing I ever did in my life. How was I to help it? There stood the visible truth before me, looking out of the woman's grey eyes. What was I to do? I thank God, I have never seen the truth plain before me, let it look ever so ghostly, without rushing at it. All my advances have been by a sudden act—to me like an inspiration;—an act done in terror, almost, lest I should stop and think about it, and fail to do it. And here was no ghost, but a woman-angel, whose 'Thou art the man' was spoken out of profundities of sweetness and truth. Could I turn my back upon her? Could I parley with her?—with the Truth? No. I fell on my knees, weeping like a child; for all my misery, all my sense of bondage and untruth, broke from me in those tears.

"My hat had fallen off as I knelt. My head was bowed on my hands. I felt as if she could save me. I dared not look up. She tells me since that she was bewildered and frightened, but I discovered nothing of that. At length I felt a light pressure, a touch of healing, fall on my bended head. It was her hand. Still I hid my face, for I was ashamed before her.

"'Come,' she said, in a low voice, which I daresay she compelled to be firm; 'come with me into the Westland Woods. There we can talk. Some one may come this way.'

"She has told me since that a kind of revelation came to her at the moment; a sight not of the future but of the fact;

and that this lifted her high above every feeling of mere propriety, substituting for it a conviction of right. She felt that God had given this man to her; and she no more hesitated to ask me to go with her into the woods, than she would hesitate to go with me now if I asked her. And indeed if she had not done so, I don't know what would have come of it—how the story would have ended. I believe I should be kneeling there now, a whitened skeleton, to the terror and warning of all false churchmen who should pass through the lonely lane.

“I rose at once, like an obedient child, and turned in the direction of the Westland Woods, feeling that she was by my side, but not yet daring to look at her.—Now there are few men to whom I would tell the trifle that followed. It was a trifle as to the outside of it; but it is amazing what virtue, in the old meaning of the word, may lie in a trifle. The recognition of virtue is at the root of all magical spells, and amulets, and talismans. Mind, I felt from the first that you and I would understand each other.”

“You rejoice my heart,” I said.

“Well, the first thing I had to do, as you may suppose, to make me fit to look at her, was to wipe my eyes. I put my hand in my pocket; then the other hand in the other pocket; then my first hand in the breast pocket; and the slow-dawning awful truth became apparent, that here was a great brute of a curate, who had been crying like a baby, and had no handkerchief. A moment of keen despair followed—chased away by a vision of hope, in the shape of a little white cloud between me and the green grass. This cloud floated over a lady's hand, and was in fact a delicate handkerchief. I took it, and brought it to my eyes, which gratefully acknowledged the comfort. And the scent of the lavender—not lavender water, but the lavender itself, that puts you in mind of country churches, and old bibles, and dusky low-ceiled parlours on

Sunday afternoons—the scent of the lavender was so pure and sweet, and lovely! It gave me courage.

“ ‘May I keep it?’ I asked.

“ ‘Yes. Keep it,’ she answered.

“ ‘Will you take my arm now?’

“For answer, she took my arm, and we entered the woods. It was a summer afternoon. The sun had outflanked the thick clouds of leaves that rendered the woods impregnable from overhead, and was now shining in, a little sideways, with that slumberous light belonging to summer afternoons, in which everything, mind and all, seems half asleep and all dreaming.

“ ‘Let me carry the jug,’ I said.

“ ‘No,’ she answered, with a light laugh; ‘you would be sure to spill the cream, and spoil both your coat and mamma’s tea.’

“ ‘Then put it down in this hollow till we come back.’

“ ‘It would be full of flies and beetles in a moment. Besides we won’t come back this way, shall we? I can carry it quite well. Gentlemen don’t like carrying things.’

“I feared lest the tone the conversation had assumed, might lead me away from the resolution I had formed while kneeling in the lane. So, as usual with me, I rushed blindly on the performance.

“ ‘Miss Lizzie, I am a hypocritical and unhappy wretch.’

“She looked up at me with a face full of compassionate sympathy. I could have lost myself in that gaze. But I would not be turned from my purpose, of which she had no design, though her look had almost the power; and, the flood-gates of speech once opened, out it came, the whole confession I have made to you—in what form or manner, I found, the very first time I looked back upon the relation, that I had quite forgotten.

"All the time, the sun was sending ever so many sloping ladders of light down through the trees, for there was a little mist rising that afternoon; and I felt as if they were the same kind of ladder that Jacob saw, inviting a man to climb up to the light and peace of God. I felt as if upon them invisible angels were going up and down all through the summer wood, and that the angels must love our woods as we love their skies. And amidst the trees and the ladders of ether, we walked, and I talked, and Lizzie listened to all I had to say, without uttering a syllable till I had finished.

"At length, having disclosed my whole bondage and grief, I ended with the question:

"'Now, what is to be done?'

"She looked up in my face with those eyes of truth, and said:

"'That money must be paid, Mr. Armstrong.'

"'But how?' I responded, in despair.

"She did not seem to heed my question, but she really answered it.

"'And, if I were you, I would do no more duty till it was paid.'

"Here was decision with a vengeance. It was more than I had bargained for. I was dumb. A moment's reflection, however, showed me that she was perfectly right—that what I had called 'decision with a vengeance,' was merely the utterance of a child's perception of the true way to walk in.

"Still I was silent; for long vistas of duty, and loss, and painful action and effort opened before me. At length I said:

"'You are quite right, Miss Lizzie.'

"'I wish I could pay it for you,' she rejoined, looking up in my face with an expression of still tenderness, while the tears clouded her eyes just as clouds of a deeper grey come over the grey depths of some summer skies.

“‘But you can help me to pay it.’

“‘How?’

“‘Love me,’ I said, and no more. I could not.

“The only answer she made, was to look up at me once more, then stop, and, turning towards me, draw herself gently against my side, as she held my arm. It was enough—was it not?

“‘Love me,’ I said, and she did love me ; and she’s down stairs, as I told you ; and I think she is not unhappy.”

“But you’re not going to stop there,” I said.

“No, I’m not.—That very evening I told the vicar that I must go. He pressed for my reasons ; but I managed to avoid giving a direct answer. I begged him to set me at liberty as soon as possible, meaning, when he should have provided himself with a substitute. But he took offence at last, and told me I might go when I pleased ; for he was quite able to perform the duties himself. After this, I felt it would be unpleasant for him as well as for me, if I remained, and so I took him at his word. And right glad I was not to have to preach any more to Lizzie. It was time for me to act instead of talk.

“But what was I to do ? The moment the idea of ceasing to ‘do church’ was entertained by me, the true notion of what I was to do instead presented itself. It was this. I would apply to my cousin, the accountant. He was an older man, considerably, than myself, and had already made a fortune in his profession. We had been on very good terms indeed, considering that he was a dissenter, and all but hated the church ; while, I fear, I quite despised dissenters. I had often dined with him, and he had found out that I had a great turn for figures, as he called it. Having always been fond of mathematics, I had been able to assist him in arriving at a true conclusion on what had been to him a knotty point

connected with life-insurance ; and consequently he had a high opinion of my capacity in his department.

“I wrote to him, telling him I had resolved to go into business for a time. I did not choose to enlighten him further; and I fear I fared the better with him from his fancying that I must have begun to entertain doubts concerning church-establishments. I had the cunning not to ask him to employ me ; for I thought it very likely he would request my services, which would put me in a better position with him. And it fell out as I had anticipated. He replied at once, offering me one hundred and fifty pounds to begin, with the prospect of an annual advance of twenty pounds, if, upon further trial, we both found the arrangement to our minds. I knew him to be an honourable man, and accepted the proposal at once. And I cannot tell how light-hearted I felt as I folded up my canonicals, and put them in a box to be left, for the meantime, in the charge of my landlady.

“I was troubled with no hesitation as to the propriety of the proceeding. Of course I felt that if it had been mere money-making, a clergyman ought to have had nothing to do with it ; but I felt now, on the other hand, that if any man was bound to pay his debts, a clergyman was ; in fact, that he could not do his duty till he had paid his debts ; and that the wrong was not in turning to business now, but in having undertaken the office with a weight of filthy lucre on my back and my conscience, which my pocket could never relieve them of. Any scruple about the matter, I felt would be only superstition ; that, in fact, it was a course of action worthy of a man, and therefore of a clergyman. I thought well enough of the church, too, to believe that every man of any manliness in it, would say that I had done right. And, to tell the truth, so long as Lizzie was satisfied with me, I did not care for arch-deacon, or bishop. I meant just to drop out of the ranks of

the clergy without sign, and keep my very existence as secret as possible, until the moment I had achieved my end, when I would go to my bishop, and tell him all, requesting to be reinstated in my sacred office. There was only one puzzle in the affair, and that was how to act towards Mrs. Payton in regard to her daughter's engagement to me. The old lady was not gifted with much common sense, I knew; and I feared both that she would be shocked at the idea, and that she would not keep my secret. Of course I consulted Lizzie about it. She had been thinking about it already, and had concluded that the best way would be for her to tell her mother the fact of our engagement, and for me to write to her from London that I did not intend taking a second charge for some time yet; and so leave Lizzie to act for the rest as occasion might demand. All this was very easily managed, and in the course of another week, chiefly devoted to the Westland Woods, I found myself at a desk in Cannon Street.

“And now began a real experience of life. I had resolved to regard the money I earned as the ransom-money of the church, paid by her for the redemption of an erring servant from the power of Mammon: I would therefore spend upon myself not one penny more than could be helped. With this view, and perhaps with a lurking notion of penance in some corner of my stupid brain, I betook myself to a lodging-house in Hatton Garden, where I paid just three shillings a week for a bedroom, if that could be called a room which was rather a box, divided from a dozen others by partitions of seven or eight feet in height. I had, besides, the use of a common room, with light and fire, and the use of a kitchen for cooking my own victuals, if I required any, presided over by an old man, who was rather dirtier than necessity could justify, or the amount of assistance he rendered could excuse. But I

managed to avoid this region of the establishment, by both breakfasting and dining in eating-houses, of which I soon found out the best and cheapest. It is amazing upon how little a man with a good constitution, a good conscience, and an object, can live in London. I lived and throve. My bedroom, though as small as it could possibly have been, was clean, with all its appointments; and for a penny a week additional, I had the use of a few newspapers. The only luxuries I indulged in, besides one pipe of bird's-eye a day, were writing verses, and teaching myself German. This last led to some little extravagance, for I soon came to buy German books at the book-stalls; but I thought the church would get the advantage of it by and by; and so I justified myself in it. I translated a great many German songs. Now and then you will hear my brother sing one of them. He was the only one of my family who knew where I lived. The others addressed their letters to my cousin's place of business. My father was dreadfully cut up at my desertion of the church, as he considered it. But I told my brother the whole story, and he went home, as he declared, prouder of his big brother than if he had been made a bishop of. I believe he soon comforted the dear old man, by helping him to see the matter in its true light; and not one word of reproach did I ever receive from his lips or his pen. He did his best likewise to keep the whole affair a secret.

"But a thousand pounds with interest, was a dreadful sum. However, I paid the interest and more than fifty pounds of the principal the first year. One good thing was, I had plenty of clothes, and so could go a long time without becoming too shabby for business. I repaired them myself. I brushed my own boots. Occasionally I washed my own collars.

"But it was rather dreadful to think of the years that must pass before I could be clear, before I could marry Lizzie,

before I could open my mouth again to utter truths which I now began to *see*, and which grew dearer to me than existence itself. As to Lizzie, I comforted myself by thinking that it did not matter much whether we were married or not—we loved each other; and that was all that made marriage itself a good thing, and we had the good thing as it was. We corresponded regularly, and I need not say that this took a great many hours from German and other luxuries, and made the things I did not like, much easier to bear.

“I am not stoic enough to be able to say that the baseness and meanness of things about me gave me no discomfort. In my father’s house, I had been used to a little simple luxury, for he liked to be comfortable himself, and could not be so, unless he saw every one comfortable about him as well. At college, likewise, I had not thwarted the tendency to self-indulgence, as my condition now but too plainly testified. It will be clear enough to you, Mr. Smith, that there must have been things connected with such a mode of life, exceedingly distasteful to one who had the habits of a gentleman; but it was not the circumstances so much as the companions of my location, that bred me discomfort. The people who shared the same roof with me, I felt bound to acknowledge as so sharing, although at first it was difficult to know how to behave to them, and their conduct sometimes caused me excessive annoyance. They were of all births and breedings, but almost all of them, like myself, under a cloud. It was not much that I had to associate with them; but even while glancing at a paper before going up to my room, for I allowed myself no time for that at the office, I could not help occasionally hearing language which disgusted me to the back-bone, and made me say to myself, as I went slowly up the stairs, ‘My sins have found me out, and I am in hell for them.’ Then, as I sat on the side of my bed in my stall, the vision of the past would

come before me in all its beauty—the Westland Woods, the open country, the comfortable abode, and above all, the homely gracious old church, with its atmosphere of ripe sacredness and age-long belief; for now I looked upon that reading-desk, and that pulpit, with new eyes and new thoughts, as I will presently try to show you. I had not really lost them, in the sense in which I regarded them now, as types of a region of possibly noble work; but even with their old aspect, they would have seemed more honourable than this constant labour in figures from morning to night, till I thought sometimes that the depth of punishment would be to have to reckon to all eternity. But, as I have said, I had my consolations—Lizzie's letters, my books, a walk to Hampstead Heath on a holiday, an occasional peep into Goethe or Schiller on a bright day in St. Lawrence Pountney churchyard, to which I managed to get admittance; and, will you believe it? going to a city church on Sundays. More of this anon. So that, if I was in hell for my sins, it was at least not one of Swedenborg's hells. Never before did I understand what yet I had always considered one of the most exquisite sonnets I knew:

“Mourner, that dost deserve thy mournfulness,
 Call thyself punished, call the earth thy hell;
 Say, ‘God is angry, and I earned it well;
 I would not have him smile and not redress.’
 Say this, and straightway all thy grief grows less.
 ‘God rules at least, I find, as prophets tell,
 And proves it in this prison.’ Straight thy cell
 Smiles with an unsuspected loveliness.
 —‘A prison—and yet from door and window-bar,
 I catch a thousand breaths of his sweet air;
 Even to me, his days and nights are fair;
 He shows me many a flower, and many a star;
 And though I mourn, and he is very far,
 He does not kill the hope that reaches there.’”

“Where did you get that wonderful sonnet?” I cried

hardly interrupting him, for when he came to the end of it, he paused with a solemn pause.

"It is one of the stars of the higher heavens which I spied through my prison-bars."

"Will you give me a copy of it?"

"With all my heart. It has never been in print."

"Then your star reminds me of that quaint simile of Henry Vaughan,

' If a star were confined into a tomb,
Her captive flames must needs burn there ;
But when the hand that locked her up gives room,
She'll shine through all the sphere.' "

"Ah yes ; I know the poem. That is about the worst verse in it, though."

"Quite true."

"What a number of verses you know !"

"They stick to me somehow."

"Is the sonnet your own?"

"My dear fellow, how could I speak in praise of it as I do, if it were my own? I would say 'I wish it were!' only that would be worse selfishness than coveting a man's purse. No. It is not mine."

"Well, will you go on with your story—if you will yet oblige me."

"I will. But I fear you will think it strange that I should be so communicative to one whose friendship I have so lately gained."

"I believe there is a fate in such things," I answered.

"Well, I yield to it—if I do not weary you?"

"Go on. There is positively not the least danger of that."

"Well, it was not to hell I was really sent, but to school—and that not a fashionable boarding, or expensive public

school, but a day-school like a Scotch parish school—to learn the conditions and ways and thoughts of my brothers and sisters.

“I soon got over the disgust I felt at the coarseness of the men I met. Indeed I found amongst business-gentlemen what affected me with the same kind of feeling—only perhaps more profoundly—a coarseness not of the social so much as of the spiritual nature—in a word, genuine selfishness ; whereas this quality was rather less remarkable in those who had less to be selfish about. I do not say therefore that they had less of it. I soon saw that their profanity had chiefly a negative significance ; but it was long before I could get sufficiently accustomed to their vileness, their beastliness—I beg the beasts’ pardon!—to keep from leaving the room when a vein of that sort was opened. But I succeeded in schooling myself to bear it. ‘For,’ thought I, ‘there must be some bond—some ascertainable and recognizable bond between these men and me ; I mean some bond that might show itself as such to them and me.’ I found out, before long, that there was a tolerably broad and visible one—nothing less than our human nature, recognized as such. For by degrees I came to give myself to know them. I sat and talked to them, smoked with them, gave them tobacco, lent them small moneys, made them an occasional trifling present of some article of dress, of which I had more than I wanted ; in short, gained their confidence. It was strange, but without any reproof from me, nothing more direct than simple silence, they soon ceased to utter a word that could offend me ; and before long, I had heard many of their histories. And what stories they were ! Set any one to talk about himself, instead of about other people, and you will have a seam of the precious mental metal opened up to you at once ; only ore, most likely, that needs much smelting and refining ; or it may be, not gold at all, but a metal which

your mental alchemy may turn into gold. The one thing I learned was, that they and I were one, that our hearts were the same. How often I exclaimed inwardly, as some new trait came to light, in the words, though without the generalizing scorn, of Shakspeare's Timon—'More man!' Sometimes I was seized with a kind of horror, beholding my own visage in the mirror which some poor wretch's story held up to me—distorted perhaps by the flaws in the glass, but still mine: I saw myself in other circumstances and under other influences, and felt sometimes for a moment, as if I had been guilty of the very deeds—more often of the very neglects that had brought my companion to misery. I felt in the most solemn moods of reflection, that I might have done all that, and become all that. I saw but myself, over and over again, with wondrous variations, none sufficient to destroy the identity. And I said to myself that, if I was so like them in all that was undesirable, it must be possible for them to become like me in all, whatever it was, that rendered me in any way superior to them.

"But wherein did this superiority consist? I saw that whatever it was, I had little praise in it. I said, 'What have I done to be better than I found myself? If Lizzie had not taken me in hand, I should not have done even this. What an effort it would need for one of these really to begin to rouse and raise himself! And what have I done to rouse and raise myself, to whom it would surely be easier? And how can I hope to help them to rise till I have risen myself? It is not enough to be above them: only by the strength of my own rising can I help to raise them, for we are bound together by one cord. Then how shall I rise? Whose uprising shall lift me? On what cords shall I lay hold to be heaved out of the pit?' And then I thought of the story of the Lord of men, who arose by his own might, not alone from

the body-tomb, but from all the death and despair of humanity, and lifted with him our race, placing their tomb beneath their feet, and them in the sunny hope that belongs to them, and for which they were created—the air of their own freedom. ‘But,’ I said to myself, ‘this is ideal, and belongs to the race. Before it comes true for the race, it must be done in the individual. If it be true for the race, it can only be through its being attainable by the individual. There must be something in the story belonging to the individual. I will look at the individual Christ, and see how he arose.’

“And then I saw that the Lord himself was clasped in the love of the Father; that it was in the power of mighty communion that the daily obedience was done; that besides the outward story of his devotion to men, there was the inward story—actually revealed to us men, marvellous as that is—the inward story of his devotion to his father; of his speech to him; of his upward look; of his delight in giving up to Him. And the answer to his prayers comes out in his deeds. As Novalis says: ‘In solitude the heavenly heart unfolded itself to a flower-chalice of almighty love, turned towards the high face of the Father.’ I saw that it was in virtue of this, that, again to use the words of Novalis, ‘the mystery was unsealed. Heavenly spirits heaved the aged stone from the gloomy grave; angels sat by the slumberer, bodied forth, in delicate forms, from his dreams. Waking in new God-glories, he clomb the height of the new-born world; buried with his own hand the old corpse in the forsaken cavern, and laid thereon, with almighty arm, the stone which no might raises again. Yet weep thy beloved, tears of joy, and of boundless thanks at thy grave; still ever, with fearful gladness, behold thee arisen, and themselves with thee.’ If then he is the captain of our salvation, the head of the body of the human church, I must rise by partaking in my degree of his food, by doing in my degree

his work. I fell on my knees and I prayed to the Father. I rose, and bethinking me of the words of the Son, I went and tried to do them. I need say no more to you. A new life awoke in me from that hour, feeble and dim, but yet life; and often as it has stopped growing, that has always been my own fault. Where it will end, thank God! I cannot tell. But existence is an awful grandeur and delight.

“Then I understood the state of my fellow-men, with all their ignorance, and hate, and revenge; some misled by passion, some blinded by dulness, some turned monomaniacs from a fierce sense of injustice done them; and I said, ‘There is no way of helping them but by being good to them, and making them trust me. But in every one of them there lies a secret chamber, to which God has access from behind by a hidden door; while they know nothing of this chamber; and the other door towards their own consciousness, is hidden by darkness and wrong, and ruin of all kinds. Sometimes they become dimly aware that there must be such a door. Some of us search for it, find it, turn back aghast; while God is standing behind the door waiting to be found, and ready to hold forth the arms of eternal tenderness to him who will open and look. Some of us have torn the door open, and, lo! there is the Father, at the heart of us, at the heart of all things.’ I saw that he was leading these men through dark ways of disappointment and misery, the cure of their own wrong-doing, to find this door and find him. But could nothing be done to help them—to lead them? They, too, must learn of Christ. Could they not be led to him? If He leads to the Father, could not man lead to Him? True, he says that it is the leading of the Father that brings to Him; for the Father is all in all; He fills and rounds the cycle. But He leads by the hand of man. Then I said, ‘Is not this *the* work of the church?’

“And with this new test, I went to one church after another. And the prayers were beautiful. And my soul was comforted by them. And the troubles of the week sank back into the far distance, and God ruled in London city. But how could such as I thought of, love these prayers, or understand them? For them the voice of living man was needed. And surely the spirit that dwelt in the Church never intended to make less of the voice of a living man pleading with his fellow-men in his own voice, than the voice of many people pleading with God in the words which those who had gone to Him had left behind them. If the Spirit be in the church, does it only pray? Yet almost as often as a man stood up to preach, I knew again why Lizzie had paid no heed to me. All he said had nothing to do with me or my wants. And if not with these, how could they have any influence on the all but outcasts of the social order? I justified Lizzie to the very full now; and I took refuge from the inanity of the sermon in thinking about her faithfulness. And that faithfulness was far beyond anything I knew yet.

“And now there awoke in me an earnest longing after the office I had forsaken. Thoughts began to burn in me, and words to come unbidden, till sometimes I had almost to restrain myself from rising from the pew where I was seated, ascending the pulpit stairs, and requesting the man who had nothing to say, to walk down, and allow me, who had something to say, to take his place. Was this conceit? Considering what I was listening to, it could not have been *great* conceit at least. But I did restrain myself, for I thought an encounter with the police would be unseemly, and my motives scarcely of weight in the court to which they would lead me.”

Here Mr. Armstrong relieved himself and me with a good laugh. I say relieved me, for his speech had held me in a state of tension such as to be almost painful.

“But I looked to the future in hope,” he went on,—“if ever I might be counted worthy to resume the labour I had righteously abandoned; having had the rightness confirmed by the light I had received in carrying out the deed.”

His voice here sank as to a natural pause, and I thought he was going to end his story.

“Tell me something more,” I said.

“Oh!” returned he, “as far as story is concerned, the best of it is to come yet.—About six months after I was fairly settled in London, I was riding in an omnibus, a rare enough accommodation with me, in the dusk of an afternoon. I was going out to Fulham to dine with my cousin, as I was sometimes forced to do. He was a good-hearted man, but—in short, I did not find him interesting. I would have preferred talking to a man who had barely escaped the gallows or the hulks. My cousin never did anything plainly wicked, and consequently never repented of anything. He thought no harm of being petty and unfair. He would not have taken a farthing that was not his own, but if he could get the better of you in an argument, he did not care by what means. He would put a wrong meaning on your words, that he might triumph over you, knowing all the time it was not what you meant. He would say: ‘Words are words. I have nothing to do with your meanings. You may say you mean anything you like.’ I wish it had been his dissent that made him such. But I won’t say more about him, for I believe it is my chief fault, as to my profession, that I find common-place people dreadfully uninteresting; and I am afraid I don’t always give them quite fair play.—I had to dine with him, and so I got into an omnibus going along the Strand. And I had not been long in it, before I began thinking about Lizzie. That was not very surprising.

“Next to me, nearer the top of the omnibus, sat a young

woman, with a large brown paper parcel on her lap. She dropped it, and I picked it up for her ; but seeing that it incommoded her considerably, I offered to hold it for her. She gave a kind of start when I addressed her, but allowed me to take the parcel. I could not see her face, because she was close to my side. But a strange feeling came over me, as if I was sitting next to Lizzie. I indulged in the fancy not from any belief in it, only for the pleasure of it. But it grew to a great desire to see the young woman's face, and find whether or not she was at all like Lizzie. I could not, however, succeed in getting a peep within her bonnet ; and so strong did the desire become, that, when the omnibus stopped at the circus, and she rose to get out, I got out first, without restoring the parcel, and stood to hand her out, and then give it back. Not yet could I see her face ; but she accepted my hand, and with a thrill of amazement, I felt a pressure of mine, which surely could be nobody's but Lizzie's. And it was Lizzie sure enough ! I kept the parcel ; she put her arm in mine, and we crossed the street together, without a word spoken.

“ ‘Lizzie !’ I said, when we got into a quieter part.

“ ‘Ralph !’ she said, and pressed closer to my side.

“ ‘How did you come here ?’

“ ‘Ah ! I couldn't escape you.’

“ ‘How did you come here ?’ I repeated.

“ ‘You did not think,’ she answered, with a low musical laugh, ‘that I was going to send you away to work, and take no share in it myself !’

“And then out came the whole truth. As soon as I had left, she set about finding a situation, for she was very clever with her needle and scissors. Her mother could easily do without her, as her eldest sister was at home ; and her absence would relieve their scanty means. She had been more fortunate than she could have hoped, and had found a good situa-

tion with a dressmaker in Bond Street. Her salary was not large, but it was likely to increase, and she had nothing to pay for food or lodging; while, like myself, she was well provided with clothes, and had, besides, facilities for procuring more. And to make a long story as short as now may be, there she remained in her situation as long as I remained in mine; and every quarter she brought me all she could spare of her salary for the Jew to gorge upon."

"And you took it?" I said, rather inadvertently.

"Took it! Yes. I took it—thankfully as I would the blessing of heaven. To have refused it would have argued me unworthy of *her*. We understood each other too well for anything else. She shortened my purgatory by a whole year—my Lizzie! It is over now; but none of it will be over to all eternity. She made a man of me."

A pause followed, as was natural, and neither spoke for some moments. The ends of our cigars had been thrown away long ago, but I did not think of offering another. At length I said, for the sake of saying something:

"And you met pretty often, I daresay?"

"Every Sunday at church."

"Of all places, the place where you ought to have met."

"It was. We met in a quiet old city church, where there was nothing to attract us but the loneliness, the service, and the bones of Milton."

"And when you had achieved your end—"

"It was but a means to an end. I went at once to a certain bishop; told him the whole story, not in quite such a lengthy shape as I have told it to you; and begged him to reinstate me in my office."

"And what did he say?"

"Nothing. The good man did not venture upon many words. He held out his hand to me; shook mine warmly;

and here I am, you see, curate of St. Thomas's, Purleybridge, and husband of Lizzie Payton. Am I not a fortunate fellow?"

"You are," I said, with emphasis, rising to take my leave. "But it is too bad of me to occupy so much of your time on a Saturday."

"Don't be uneasy about that. I shall preach all the better for it."

As I passed the parlour door, it was open, and Lizzie *was* busy with a baby's frock. I think I should have known it for one, even if I had not been put on the scent. She nodded kindly to me as I passed out. I knew she was not one of the demonstrative sort, else I should have been troubled that she did not speak to me. I thought afterwards that she suspected, from the sustained sound of her husband's voice, that he had been telling his own story; and that therefore she preferred letting me go away without speaking to me that morning.

"What a story for our club!" thought I. "Surely that would do Adela good now."

But of course I saw at once that it would not do. I could not for a moment wish that the curate should tell it. Yet I did wish that Adela could know it. So I have written it *now*; and there it is, as nearly as he told it, as I could manage to record it.

The next day was Sunday. And here is a part of the curate's sermon.

"My friends, I will give you a likeness, or a parable, which I think will help you to understand what is the matter with you all. For you all have something the matter with you; and most of you know this to be case; though you may not know what is the matter. And those of you that feel nothing amiss are far the worst off. Indeed you are; for how are things to be set right if you do not even know that there is

anything to be set right? There is the greatest danger of everything growing much worse, before you find out that anything is wrong.

“But now for my parable.

“It is a cold winter forenoon, with the snow upon everything out of doors. The mother has gone out for the day, and the children are amusing themselves in the nursery—pretending to make such things as men make. But there is one among them who joins in their amusement only by fits and starts. He is pale and restless, yet inactive.—His mother is away. True, he is not well. But he is not very unwell; and if she were at home, he would take his share in everything that was going on, with as much enjoyment as any of them. But as it is, his fretfulness and pettishness make no allowance for the wilfulness of his brothers and sisters; and so the confusions they make in the room, carry confusion into his heart and brain; till at length a brighter noon entices the others out into the snow.

“Glad to be left alone, he seats himself by the fire and tries to read. But the book he was so delighted with yesterday, is dull to-day. He looks up at the clock and sighs, and wishes his mother would come home. Again he betakes himself to his book, and the story transports his imagination to the great icebergs on the polar sea. But the sunlight has left them, and they no longer gleam and glitter and sparkle, as if spangled with all the jewels of the hot tropics, but shine cold and threatening as they tower over the ice-bound ship. He lays down the tale, and takes up a poem. But it too is frozen. The rhythm will not flow. And the sad feeling arises in his heart, that it is not so very beautiful, after all, as he had used to think it.

“‘Is there anything beautiful?’ says the poor boy at length, and wanders to the window. But the sun is under a cloud;

cold, white, and cheerless, like death, lies the wide world out of doors ; and the prints of his mother's feet in the snow, all point towards the village, and away from home. His head aches ; and he cannot eat his dinner. He creeps upstairs to his mother's room. There the fire burns bright, and through the window falls a ray of sunlight. But the fire and the very sunlight are wintry and sad. 'Oh, when will mother be home?' He lays himself in a corner amongst soft pillows, and rests his head ; but it is no rest for him, for the covering wings are not there. The bright-coloured curtains look dull and grey ; and the clock on the chimney-piece will not hasten its pace one second, but is very monotonous and unfeeling. Poor child ! Is there any joy in the world ? Oh yes ; but it always clings to the mother, and follows her about like a radiance, and she has taken it with her. Oh, when will she be home ? The clock strikes as if it meant something, and then straightway goes on again with the old wearisome tic-tac.

"He can hardly bear it. The fire burns up within, daylight goes down without ; the near world fades into darkness ; the far-off worlds brighten and come forth, and look from the cold sky into the warm room ; and the boy stares at them from the couch, and watches the motion of one of them, like the flight of a great golden beetle, against the divisions of the window-frame. Of this, too, he grows weary. Everything around him has lost its interest. Even the fire, which is like the soul of the room, within whose depths he has so often watched for strange forms and images of beauty and terror, has ceased to attract his tired eyes. He turns his back to it, and sees only its flickerings on the walls. To any one else, looking in from the cold frosty night, the room would appear the very picture of afternoon comfort and warmth ; and he, if he were descried thus nestling in its softest, warmest nook, would be counted a

blessed child, without care, without fear, made for enjoyment, and knowing only fruition. But the mother is gone; and as that flame-lighted room would appear to the passing eye, without the fire, and with but a single candle to thaw the surrounding darkness and cold, so is that child's heart without the presence of the mother.

"Worn out at length with loneliness and mental want, he closes his eyes, and after the slow lapse of a few more empty moments, reopens them on the dusky ceiling, and the grey twilight window; no—on two eyes near above him, and beaming upon him, the stars of a higher and holier heaven than that which still looks in through the unshaded windows. They are the eyes of the mother, looking closely and anxiously on her sick boy. 'Mother, mother!' His arms cling around her neck, and pull down her face to his.

"His head aches still, but the heart-ache is gone. When candles are brought, and the chill night is shut out of doors and windows, and the children are all gathered around the tea-table, laughing and happy, no one is happier, though he does not laugh, than the sick child, who lies on the couch and looks at his mother. Everything around is full of interest and use, glorified by the radiation of her presence. Nothing can go wrong. The splendour returns to the tale and the poem. Sickness cannot make him wretched. Now when he closes his eyes, his spirit dares to go forth wandering under the shining stars and above the sparkling snow; and nothing is any more dull and unbeautiful. When night draws on, and he is laid in his bed, her voice sings him, and her hand soothes him, to sleep; nor do her influences vanish when he forgets everything in sleep; for he wakes in the morning well and happy, made whole by his faith in his mother. A power has gone forth from her love to heal and restore him.

"Brothers, sisters! do I not know your hearts from my own?

—sick hearts, which nothing can restore to health and joy but the presence of Him who is Father and Mother both in one. Sunshine is not gladness, because you see him not. The stars are far away, because He is not near; and the flowers, the smiles of old Earth, do not make you smile, because, although, thank God! you cannot get rid of the child's need, you have forgotten what it is the need of. The winter is dreary and dull, because, although you have the homeliest of homes, the warmest of shelters, the safest of nests to creep into and rest—though the most cheerful of fires is blazing for you, and a table is spread, waiting to refresh your frozen and weary hearts—you have forgot the way thither, and will not be troubled to ask the way; you shiver with the cold and the hunger, rather than arise and say, 'I will go to my Father;' you will die in the storm rather than fight the storm; you will lie down in the snow rather than tread it under foot. The heart within you cries out for something, and you let it cry. It is crying for its God—for its father and mother and home. And all the world will look dull and grey—and if it does not look so now, the day will come when it must look so—till your heart is satisfied and quieted with the known presence of Him in whom we live and move and have our being."

CHAPTER X.

MY SECOND STORY.

It was again my turn to read. I opened my manuscript and had just opened my mouth as well, when I was arrested for a moment. For, happening to glance to the other side of the room, I saw that Percy had thrown himself at full length on a couch, opposite to that on which Adela was seated, and was watching her face with all his eyes. But his look did not express love so much as jealousy. Indeed I had seen small sign of his being attached to her. If she had encouraged him, which certainly she did not, I daresay his love might have come out ; but I presume that he had been comfortably content until now, when perhaps some remark of his mother had made him fear a rival. Mischief of some sort was evidently brewing. A human cloud, surcharging itself with electric fire, lay swelling on the horizon of our little assembly ; but I did not anticipate much danger from any storm that could break from such a quarter. I believed that as far as my good friend, the colonel, was concerned, Adela might at least refuse whom she pleased. Whether she might find herself at equal liberty to choose whom she pleased, was a question that I was unprepared to answer. And I could not think about it now. I had to read. So I gave out the title—and went on :

"THE SHADOWS."

But I had not read far when Adela interrupted me.

"Uncle," she said, "you told me it was not to be a fairy tale."

"Well, I don't think you will call it one when you have heard it," I answered. "But I am not particular as to names. The fairies have not much to do with it anyhow."

"I beg your pardon, uncle," she rejoined; and I went on.

I got on a good way without farther interruption; but at length—

"What does that mean?" asked Adela.

And I am ashamed to say I could only answer, "I am not sure," and made haste to resume.

"Now what *does* that mean?" said Adela again.

"How can I tell?" I answered, and went on.

A period of steady reading followed. Then came:

"Now don't you try, uncle, there's a dear, to make any fun; for you know you can't. It's always a failure," said Adela, looking as mischievous as she could. "You can make people cry: you can't make them laugh. So don't try it. It hurts my feelings dreadfully when you fail; and gives me a pain in the back of my neck besides."

I heard her with delight, but went on, saying:

"I must read what I have written, you monkey!"

I was giving little stories told by this and that shadow, when all at once, at the close of one of them, I was startled by Adela's voice at my ear.

"Ah, I thought so!" she cried.

Peeping over my shoulder she had discovered that I had this last tale on a separate slip of paper.

"I thought so!" she repeated. "That is yours, Mr. Armstrong! It is not his at all. He stole it out of your sermon."

"You are excessively troublesome to-night, Adela," I rejoined. "But I confess the theft."

"He had quite a right to take what I had done with, Miss Cathcart," said the curate; and I once more resumed.

When I had finished my story, the not unusual silence followed. It was broken by Adela.

"But what were those other shadows, mysteries in the midst of mystery?" persisted she.

"My dear, as the little child said shadows were the ghosts of the body, so I say these were the shadows of the mind.—Will that do?"

"I must think. I don't know. I can't trust you.—I *do* believe, uncle, you write whatever comes into your head; and then when any one asks you the meaning of this or that, you hunt round till you find a meaning just about the same size as the thing itself, and stick it on! Don't you, now?"

"Perhaps *yes*, and perhaps *no*, and perhaps both," I answered.

"You have the most confounded imagination I ever knew, Smith, my boy!" said the colonel. "You run right away, and leave me to come hobbling after as I best can."

"Oh, never mind; I always return to my wife and children," I answered; and being an old bachelor, this passed for a good joke with the kind-hearted company. No more remarks were made upon my Shadow story, though I was glad to see the curate pondering over it. Before we parted, the usual question of who was to read the next, had to be settled.

"I propose, for a change," said the curate, "that the club meet at my house the next time, and that the story be omitted for once. We'll have some music, and singing, and poetry, and all that sort of thing. What do you say, Lizzie?"

"With all my heart," answered Mrs. Armstrong.

"You forget," said the colonel, "that Adela is not well enough to go out yet."

Adela looked as if she thought that was a mistake, and glanced towards the doctor. I think Percy caught sight of the glance as it passed him.

"If I may be allowed to give a professional opinion," said Harry, "I think she could go without the smallest danger, if she were well wrapped up."

"You can have the carriage, of course, my love," said her father, "if you would like to go."

"I should very much like to go," said Adela.

And so it was settled to the evident contentment of all except the mother and son, who, I suppose, felt that Adela was slipping through their fingers, in this strengthening of adverse influences. I was sure myself, that nothing could be better for her, in either view of the case. Harry did not stay behind to ask her any questions this evening, but left with the rest.

The next day, the bright, frosty weather still continuing, I took Adela out for a walk.

"You are much better, I think, my dear," I said.

"Very much," she answered. "I think Mr. Armstrong's prescription is doing me a great deal of good. It seems like magic. I sleep very well indeed now. And somehow life seems a much more possible thing than it looked a week or two ago. And the whole world appears more like the work of God."

"I am very glad, my dear. If all your new curate tries to teach us be true, the world need not look very dreary to any of us."

"But do you believe it all, uncle?"

"Yes I do, my dear. I believe that the grand noble way of thinking of God and his will must be the true way, though it never can be grand or noble enough; and that belief in beauty and truth, notwithstanding so many things that are neither

beautiful nor true, is essential to a right understanding of the world. Whatever is not good and beautiful, is doomed by the very death that is in it ; and when we find such things in ourselves or in other people, we may take comfort that these must be destroyed one day, even if it be by that form of divine love which appears as a consuming fire."

"But that is very dreadful too, is it not, uncle?"

"Yes, my dear. But there is a refuge from it ; and then the fear proves a friend."

"What refuge?"

"God himself. If you go close up to him, his spirit will become your spirit, and you will need no fire then. You will find that that which is fire to them that are afar off, is a mighty graciousness to them that are nigh. They are both the same thing."

Adela made me no answer. Perhaps I tried to give her more than she was ready to receive. Perhaps she needed more leading, before she would be able to walk in that road. If so, then Providence was leading her ; and I need not seek to hasten a divine process.

But at least she enjoyed her walk that bright winter day, and came home without being wearied, or the cold getting any victory over her.

As we passed some cottages on our way home, Adela said,—

"There is a poor woman lives in one of these cottages, who used to be a servant of ours. She is in bad health, and I dare say is not very well off in this frost, for her husband is only a labourer. I should like to go and see her."

"With all my heart, my dear," I answered.

"This is the house," said Adela ; and she lifted the latch and went in gently, I following.

No one had heard our entrance, and when Adela knocked at the inner door, there was no reply. Whereupon she opened

the door, and then we saw the woman seated on one side of the fire, and the man on the other side with his pipe in his mouth ; while between them sat the curate with his hands in his pockets, and his pipe likewise in his mouth. But they were blowing but a small cloud between them, and were evidently very deep in an earnest conversation.

I overheard a part of what the cottager was saying, and could not help listening to the rest.

“ And the man was telling them, sir, that God had picked out so many men, women, and children, to go right away to glory, and left the rest to be damned for ever and ever in hell. And I up and spoke to him ; and ‘ sir,’ says I, ‘ if I was tould as how I was to pick out so many out o’ my childeren, and take ‘em with me to a fine house, and leave the rest to be burnt up i’ the old one, which o’ them would I choose ?’ ‘ How can I tell ?’ says he. ‘ No doubt,’ says I ; ‘ they ain’t your sons and darters. But I can. I wouldn’t move a foot, sir, but I’d take my chance wi’ the poor things. And, sir,’ says I, ‘ we’re all God’s childeren ; and which of us is he to choose, and which is he to leave out ? I don’t believe he’d know a bit better how to choose one and leave another than I should, sir—that is, his heart wouldn’t let him lose e’er a one on us, or he’d be miserable for ever, as I should be, if I left one o’ mine i’ the fire.’ ”

Here Adela had the good sense to close the door again, yet more softly than she had opened it ; and we retired.

“ That’s the right sort of man,” said I, “ to get a hold of the poor. He understands them, being himself as poor in spirit as they are in pocket—or, indeed, I might have said, as he is in pocket himself. But depend upon it he comes out both ways poorer than he went in.”

“ It should not be required of a curate to give money,” said Adela.

"Do you grudge him the blessedness of giving, Adela?"

"Oh, no. I only think it is too hard on him."

"It is as necessary for a poor man to give away, as for a rich man. Many poor men are more devoted worshippers of Mammon than some rich men."

And then I took her home.

CHAPTER XI.

THE EVENING AT THE CURATE'S.

As I led Adela, well wrapped in furs, down the steps to put her into the carriage, I felt by the wind, and saw by the sky, that a snow-storm was at hand. This set my heart beating with delight, for after all I am only what my friends call me—an old boy; and so I am still very fond of snow and wind. Of course this pleasure is often modified by the recollection that it is to most people no pleasure, and to some a source of great suffering. But then I recover myself by thinking, that I did not send for the snow, and that my enjoyment of it will neither increase their pains nor lessen my sympathies. And so I enjoy it again with all my heart. It is partly the sense of being lapt in a mysterious fluctuating depth of exquisite shapes of evanescent matter, falling like a cataract from an unknown airy gulf, where they grow into being and form out of the invisible—well-named by the prophet Job—for a prophet he was in the truest sense, all-seated in his ashes and armed with his potsherd—the womb of the snow; partly the sense of motion and the goings of the wind through the ethereal mass; partly the delight that always comes from contest with nature, a contest in which no vile passions are aroused, and no weak enemy goes helpless to the ground. I presume that in a right condition of our nervous nature, instead of our

being, as some would tell us, less exposed to the influences of nature, we should in fact be altogether open to them. Our nerves would be a thoroughfare for Nature in all and each of her moods and feelings, stormy or peaceful, sunshiny or sad. The true refuge from the slavery to which this would expose us, the subjection of man to circumstance, is to be found, not in the deadening of the nervous constitution, or in a struggle with the influences themselves, but in the strengthening of the moral and refining of the spiritual nature; so that, as the storms rave through the vault of heaven without breaking its strong arches with their winds, or staining its ethereal blue with their rain-clouds, the soul of man should keep clear and steady and great, holding within it its own feelings and even passions, knowing that, let them moan or rave as they will, they cannot touch the nearest verge of the empyrean dome, in whose region they have their birth and being.

For me, I felt myself now, just an expectant human snow-storm; and as I sat on the box by the coachman, I rejoiced to greet the first flake, which alighted on the tip of my nose even before we had cleared our own grounds. Before we had got *up street*, the wind had risen, and the snow thickened, till the horses seemed inclined to turn their tails to the hill and the storm together, for the storm came down the hill in their faces. It was soon impossible to see one's hand before one's eyes; and the carriage lamps served only to reveal a chaotic fury of snow-flakes, crossing each other's path at all angles, in the eddies of the wind amongst the houses. The coachman had to keep encouraging his horses to get them to face it at all. The ground was very slippery; and so fast fell the snow, that it had actually begun to ball in the horses' feet before we reached our destination. When we were all safe in Mrs. Armstrong's drawing-room, we sat for a while listening to the wind roaring in the chimney, before any of us spoke. And then I

did not join in the conversation, but pleased myself with looking at the room; for next to human faces, I delight in human abodes, which will always, more or less, according to the amount of choice vouchsafed in the occupancy, be like the creatures who dwell in them. Even the soldier-crab must have some likeness to the snail of whose house he takes possession, else he could not live in it at all.

The first thing to be done by one who would read a room is, to clear it as soon as possible of the air of the marvellous, the air of the story-book, which pervades every place at the first sight of it. But I am not now going to write a treatise upon this art, for which I have not time to invent a name; but only to give as much of a description of this room as will enable my readers to feel quite at home with us in it, during our evening there. It was a large low room, with two beams across the ceiling at unequal distances. There was only a drugget on the floor, and the window curtains were scanty. But there was a glorious fire on the hearth, and the tea-board was filled with splendid china, as old as the potteries. The chairs, I believe, had been brought from old Mr. Armstrong's lumber-room, and so they all looked as if they could tell stories themselves. At all events they were just the proper chairs to tell stories in, and I could not help regretting that we were not to have any to-night. The rest of the company had arrived before us. A warm corner in an old-fashioned sofa had been prepared for Adela, and as soon as she was settled in it, our hostess proceeded to pour out the tea with a simplicity and grace which showed that she had been just as much a lady when carrying parcels for the dressmaker, and would have been a lady if she had been a housemaid. Such women are rare in every circle, the best of every kind being rare. It is very disappointing to the imaginative youth when, coming up to London and going into society, he finds that so

few of the men and women he meets, come within the charmed circle of his ideal refinement.

I said to myself: "I am sure she could write a story if she would. I must have a try for one from her."

When tea was over, she looked at her husband, and then went to the piano, and sang the following ballad.—

" ' Traveller, what lies over the hill ?

Traveller, tell to me :

I am only a child—from the window-sill

Over I cannot see.'

" ' Child, there's a valley over there,

Pretty and woody and shy ;

And a little brook that says—' take care,

Or I'll drown you by and by.'

" ' And what comes next ?' ' A little town ;

And a towering hill again ;

More hills and valleys, up and down,

And a river now and then.'

" ' And what comes next ?' ' A lonely moor,

Without a beaten way ;

And grey clouds sailing slow, before

A wind that will not stay.'

" ' And then ?' ' Dark rocks and yellow sand,

And a moaning sea beside.'

" ' And then ?' ' More sea, more sea, more land,

And rivers deep and wide.'

" ' And then ?' ' Oh ! rock and mountain and vale,

Rivers and fields and men ;

Over and over—a weary tale—

And round to your home again.'

" ' Is that the end ? It is weary at best.'

' No, child ; it is not the end.

On summer eves, away in the west,

You will see a stair ascend ;

“ ‘Built of all colours of lovely stones—
 A stair up into the sky ;
 Where no one is weary, and no one moans,
 Or wants to be laid by.’ ”

“ ‘I will go.’ ‘But the steps are very steep :
 If you would climb up there,
 You must lie at its foot, as still as sleep,
 And be a step of the stair,

“ ‘For others to put their feet on you,
 To reach the stones high-piled ;
 Till Jesus comes and takes you too,
 And leads you up, my child !’ ”

“That is one of your parables, I am sure, Ralph,” said the doctor, who was sitting, quite at his ease, on a footstool, with his back against the wall, by the side of the fire opposite to Adela, casting every now and then a glance across the fiery gulf, just as he had done in church when I first saw him. And Percy was there to watch them, though, from some high words I overheard, I had judged that it was with difficulty his mother had prevailed on him to come. I could not help thinking myself, that two pairs of eyes met and parted rather oftener than any other two pairs in the room ; but I could find nothing to object.

“Now, Miss Cathcart, it is your turn to sing.”

“Would you mind singing another of Heine’s songs?” said the doctor, as he offered his hand to lead her to the piano.

“No,” she answered. “I will not sing one of that sort. It was not liked last time. Perhaps what I do sing won’t be much better though.

“The waters are rising and flowing
 Over the weedy stone—
 Over and over it going :
 It is never gone.

“ So joy on joy may go sweeping
Over the head of pain—
Over and over it leaping :
It will rise again. ”

“ Very lovely, but not much better than what I asked for.
In revenge, I will give you one of Heine's that my brother
translated. It always reminds me, with a great difference, of
one in *In Memoriam*, beginning : *Dark house.* ”

So spake Harry, and sang :

“ The shapes of the days forgotten
Out of their graves arise,
And show me what once my life was,
In the presence of thine eyes.

“ All day through the streets I wandered,
As in dreams men go and come ;
The people in wonder looked at me,
I was so mournful dumb.

“ It was better though, at night-fall,
When, through the empty town,
I and my shadow together
Went silent up and down.

“ With echoing, echoing footstep,
Over the bridge I walk ;
The moon breaks out of the waters,
And looks as if she would talk.

“ I stood still before thy dwelling,
Like a tree that prays for rain ;
I stood gazing up at thy window—
My heart was in such pain.

“ And thou lookedst through thy curtains—
I saw thy shining hand ;
And thou sawest me, in the moonlight,
Still as a statue stand. ”

"Excuse me," said Mrs. Cathcart, with a smile, "but I don't think such sentimental songs good for anybody. They can't be *healthy*—I believe that is the word they use now-a-days."

"I don't say they are," returned the doctor; "but many a pain is relieved by finding its expression. I wish he had never written worse."

"That is not why I like them," said the curate. "They seem to me to hold the same place in literature that our dreams do in life. If so much of our life is actually spent in dreaming, there must be some place in our literature for what corresponds to dreaming. Even in this region, we cannot step beyond the boundaries of our nature. I delight in reading Lord Bacon now; but one of Jean Paul's dreams will often give me more delight than one of Bacon's best paragraphs. It depends upon the mood. Some dreams like these, in poetry or in sleep, arouse individual states of consciousness altogether different from any of our waking moods, and not to be recalled by any mere effort of the will. All our being, for the moment, has a new and strange colouring. We have another kind of life. I think myself, our life would be much poorer without our dreams; a thousand rainbow tints and combinations would be gone; music and poetry would lose many an indescribable exquisiteness and tenderness. You see I like to take our dreams seriously, as I would even our fun. For I believe that those new mysterious feelings that come to us in sleep, if they be only from dreams of a richer grass and a softer wind than we have known awake, are indications of wells of feeling and delight which have not yet broken out of their hiding-places in our souls, and are only to be suspected from these rings of fairy green that spring up in the high places of our sleep."

"I say, Ralph," interrupted Harry, "just repeat that strangest of Heine's ballads, that—"

"Oh, no, no ; not that one. Mrs. Cathcart would not like it at all."

"Yes, please do," said Adela.

"Pray don't think of me, gentlemen," said the aunt.

"No, I won't," said the curate.

"Then I will," said the doctor, with a glance at Adela, which seemed to say—"If you want it, you shall have it, whether they like it or not."

He repeated, with just a touch of the recitative in his tone, the following verses :

"Night lay upon mine eyelids ;
Upon my mouth lay lead ;
With withered heart and sinews,
I lay among the dead.

"How long I lay and slumbered,
I knew not in the gloom.
I wakened up, and listened
To a knocking at my tomb.

" 'Wilt thou not rise, my Henry?
Immortal day draws on ;
The dead are all arisen ;
The endless joy begun.'

" 'My love, I cannot raise me ;
Nor could I find the door ;
My eyes with bitter weeping
Are blind for evermore.'

" 'But from thine eyes, dear Henry,
I'll kiss away the night ;
Thou shalt behold the angels,
And Heaven's own blessed light.'

" 'My love, I cannot raise me ;
The blood is flowing still,
Where thou, heart-deep, didst stab me,
With a dagger-speech, to kill.'

“ ‘Oh ! I will lay my hand, Henry,
So soft upon thy heart ;
And that will stop the bleeding—
Stop all the bitter smart.’ ”

“ ‘My love, I cannot raise me ;
My head is bleeding too.
When thou wast stolen from me,
I shot it through and through.’ ”

“ ‘With my thick hair, my Henry,
I will stop the fountain red ;
Press back again the blood-stream,
And heal thy wounded head.’ ”

“ She begged so soft, so dearly,
I could no more say *no* ;
Writhing, I strove to raise me,
And to the maiden go.

“ Then the wounds again burst open ;
And afresh the torrents break
From head and heart—life’s torrents—
And lo ! I am awake.”

“There now, that is enough !” said the curate. “That is not nice—is it, Mrs. Cathcart ?”

Mrs. Cathcart smiled, and said :

“I should hardly have thought your time well-spent in translating it, Mr. Armstrong.”

“It took me a few idle minutes only,” said the curate. “But my foolish brother, who has a child’s fancy for horrid things, took a fancy to that ; and so he won’t let my sins be forgotten. But I will take away the taste of it with another of Heine’s, seeing we have fallen upon him. I should never have dreamed of introducing him here. It was Miss Cathcart’s first song that opened the vein, I believe.”

“I am the guilty person,” said Adela ; “and I fear I am

not sorry for my sins—the consequences have been too pleasant. Do go on, Mr. Armstrong.”

He repeated :

“ Peace.

“ High in the heavens the sun was glowing ;
Around him the white clouds, like waves, were flowing
The sea was very still and grey.
Dreamily thinking as I lay,
Close by the gliding vessel's wheel,
A sleepless slumber did o'er me steal ;
And I saw the Christ, the healer of woe,
In white and waving garments go ;
Walking in giant form went he
Over the land and sea.
High in the heaven he towered his head,
And his hands in blessing forth he spread
Over the land and sea.
And for a heart, O wonder meet !
In his breast the sun did throb and beat ;
In his breast, for a heart to the only One,
Shone the red, the flaming sun.
The flaming red sunheart of the Lord
Forth its gracious life-beams poured ;
Its fair and love-benignant light
Softly shone, with warming might,
Over the land and sea.

“ Sounds of solemn bells that go
Through the still air to and fro,
Draw, like swans, in a rosy band,
The gliding ship to the grassy land,
Where a mighty city, towered and high,
Breaks and jags the line of the sky.

“ Oh, wonder of peace, how still was the town !
The hollow tumult had all gone down
Of the bustling and babbling trades.
Men and women, and youths and maids,

White clothes wearing,
Palm branches bearing,
Walked through the clean and echoing streets ;
And when one with another meets,
They look at each other with eyes that tell
That they understand each other well ;
And, trembling with love and sweet restraint,
Each kisses the other upon the brow,
And looks above, like a hoping saint,
To the holy, healing sunheart's glow ;
Which atoning all, its red blood streams
Downward in still outwelling beams ;
Till, threefold blessed, they call aloud,
The single hearts of a happy crowd,
Praised be Jesus Christ !”

“You will like that better,” concluded the curate, again addressing Mrs. Cathcart.

“Fanciful,” she answered. “I don’t like fancies about sacred things.”

“I fear, however,” replied he, “that most of our serious thoughts about sacred things are little better than fancies.”

“Sing that other of his about the flowers, and I promise you never to mention his name in this company again,” said Harry.

“Very well, I will, on that condition,” answered Ralph.

“In the sunny summer morning
Into the garden I come ;
The flowers are whispering and speaking,
But I, I wander dumb.

“The flowers are whispering and speaking,
And they gaze at my visage wan :
‘You must not be cross with our sister,
You melancholy man !’”

“Is that all ?” said Adela.

“Yes, that’s all,” answered the singer.

"But we cannot let you off with that only," she said.

"What an awful night it is!" interrupted the colonel, rising and going to the window to peep out. "Between me and the lamp, the air looks solid with driving snow."

"Sing one of your winter songs, Ralph," said the curate's wife. "This is surely stormy enough for one of your Scotch winters that you are so proud of."

Thus adjured, Mr. Armstrong sang :

"A morning clear, with frosty light
From sunbeams late and low ;
They shine upon the snow so white,
And shine back from the snow.

"From icy spears a drop will run—
Not fall : at afternoon,
It shines a diamond for the sun,
An opal for the moon.

"And when the bright sad sun is low
Behind the mountain-dome,
A twilight wind will come, and blow
All round the children's home ;

"And waft about the powdery snow,
As night's dim footsteps pass ;
But waiting, in its grave below,
Green lies the summer-grass."

"Now it seems to me," said the colonel, "though I am no authority in such matters, that it is just in such weather as this, that we don't need songs of that sort. They are not very exhilarating."

"There is truth in that," replied Mr. Armstrong. "I think it is in winter chiefly that we want songs of summer, as the Jews sang—if not the songs of Zion, yet of Zion, in a strange land. Indeed most of our songs are of this sort."

"Then sing one of your own summer songs."

"No, my dear; I would rather not. I don't altogether like them. Besides, if Harry could sing that *Tryst* of Schiller's, it would bring back the feeling of the summer better than any brooding over the remembrances of it could do."

"Did you translate that too?" I asked.

"Yes. As I told you, at one time of my life translating was a constant recreation to me. I have had many half-successes, some of which you have heard. I think this one better."

"What is the name of it?"

"It is 'Die Erwartung'—*The Waiting*, literally, or *Expectation*. But the Scotch word *Tryst* (Rendezvous) is a better name for a poem, though English. It is often curious how a literal rendering, even when it gives quite the meaning, will not do, because of the different ranks of the two words in their respective languages."

"I have heard you say," said Harry, "that the principles of the translation of lyrics have yet to be explored."

"Yes. But what I have just said, applies nearly as much to prose as to the verse.—Sing, Harry. You know it well enough."

"Part is in recitative."

"So it is. Go on."

"To enter into the poem, you must suppose a lover waiting in an arbour for his lady-love. First come two recited lines of expectation; then two more, in quite a different measure, of disappointment; and then a long-lined song of meditation; until expectation is again aroused, to be again disappointed—and so on through the poem.

"THE TRYST.

"That was the wicket a-shaking!

That was its clang as it fell!

No, 'twas but the night-wind waking,

And the poplars' answering swell.

“ Put on thy beauty, foliage-vaulted roof,
To greet her entrance, radiant all with grace ;
Ye branches weave a holy tent, star-proof ;
With lovely darkness, silent, her embrace ;
Sweet, wandering airs, creep through the leafy woof,
And toy and gambol round her rosy face,
When with its load of beauty, lightly borne,
Glides in the fairy foot, and brings my morn.

Hush ! I hear timid, yet daring
Steps that are almost a race !
No, a bird—some terror scaring—
Started from its roosting place.

“ Quench thy sunk torch, Hyperion. Night, appear !
Dim, ghostly night, lone loveliness entrancing !
Spread, purple blossoms, round us, in a sphere ;
Twine, lattice-boughs, the mystery enhancing ;
Love's joy would die, if more than two were here—
She shuns the daybeam indiscreetly glancing.
Eve's star alone—no envious tell-tale she—
Gazes unblamed, from far across the sea.

“ Hark ! distant voices, that lightly
Ripple the silence deep !
No ; the swans that, circling nightly,
Through the silver waters sweep.

“ Around me wavers an harmonious flow ;
The fountain's fall swells in delicious rushes ;
The flower beneath the west wind's kiss bends low ;
A trembling joy from each to all outgushes.
Grape-clusters beckon ; peaches luring glow,
Behind dark leaves hiding their crimson blushes ;
The winds, cooled with the sighs of flowers asleep,
Light waves of odour o'er my forehead sweep.

“ Hear I not echoing footfalls,
Hither along the pleached walk ?
No ; the over-ripened fruit falls
Heavy-swollen, from off its stalk.

“ Dull is the eye of day that flamed so bright ;
 In gentle death, its colours all are dim ;
 Unfolding fearless in the fair half light,
 The flower-cups ope, that all day closed their brim ;
 Calm lifts the moon her clear face on the night ;
 Dissolved in masses faint, Earth’s features swim ;
 Each grace withdraws the soft relaxing zone—
 Beauty unrobed shines full on me alone.

“ See I not, there, a white shimmer ?—
 Something with pale silken shine ?
 No ; it is the column’s glimmer,
 ’Gainst the gloomy hedge of pine.

“ O longing heart ! no more thy self delight
 With shadow-forms—a sweet deceiving pleasure ;
 Filling thy arms but as the vault of night
 Infoldeth darkness without hope or measure.
 O lead the living beauty to my sight,
 That living love her loveliness may treasure !
 Let but her shadow fall across my eyes,
 And straight my dreams exulting truths will rise !

And soft as, when, purple and golden,
 The clouds of the evening descend,
 So had she drawn nigh un beholden,
 And wakened with kisses her friend.”

Never had song a stranger accompaniment than this song ; for the air was full of fierce noises near and afar. Again the colonel went to the window. When he drew back the curtains, at Adela’s request, and pulled up the blind, you might have fancied the dark wind full of snowy Banshees, fleeting and flickering by, and uttering strange ghostly cries of warning. The friends crowded into the bay-window, and stared out into the night with a kind of happy awe. They pressed their brows against the panes, in the vain hope of seeing where there was no light. Every now and then the wind would rush up against the window in fierce attack, as if the creatures that rode by

upon the blast had seen the row of white faces, and it angered them to be thus stared at, and they rode their airy steeds full tilt against the thin rampart of glass that protected the human weaklings from becoming the spoil of their terrors.

While every one was silent with the intensity of this outlook, and with the awe of such an uproar of wild things without souls, there came a loud knock at the door, which was close to the window where they stood. Even the old colonel, whose nerves were as hard as piano-wires, started back and cried "God bless me!" The doctor, too, started, and began mechanically to button his coat, but said nothing. Adela gave a little suppressed scream, and ashamed of the weakness, crept away to her sofa-corner.

The servant entered, saying that Dr. Armstrong's man wanted to see him. Harry went into the passage, which was just outside the drawing-room, and the company overheard the following conversation, every word.

"Well, William?"

"There's a man come after you from Cropstone Farm, sir. His missus is took sudden."

"What? It's not the old lady then? It's the young mistress?"

"Yes; she's in labour, sir; leastways she *was*—he's been three hours on the road. I reckon it's all over by this time. You won't go, sir! It's morally impossible."

"Won't go! It's morally impossible not. You knew I would go.—That's the mare outside."

"No, sir. It's Tilter."

"Then you *did* think I wouldn't go! You knew well enough Tilter's no use for a job like this. The mare's my only chance."

"I beg your pardon, sir. I did *not* think you would go."

"Home with you, as hard as Tilter can drive—confound

him!—And bring the mare instantly. She's had her supper?"

"I left her munching, sir"

"Don't let her drink. I'll give her a quart of ale at Job Timpson's."

"You won't go that way, surely, sir?"

"It's the nearest; and the snow can't be very deep yet."

"I've brought your boots and breeches, sir."

"All right."

The man hurried out, and Harry was heard to run up stairs to his brother's room. The friends stared at each other in some perturbation. Presently Harry re-entered, in the articles last mentioned, saying—

"Ralph, have you an old shooting-coat you could lend me?"

"I should think so, Harry. I'll fetch you one."

Now at length the looks of the circle found some expression in the words of the colonel:

"Mr. Armstrong, I am an old soldier, and I trust I know what duty is. The only question is, *Can* this be done?"

"Colonel, no man can tell what can or cannot be done till he tries. I think it can."

The colonel held out his hand—his sole reply.

The schoolmaster and his wife ventured to expostulate. To them Harry made fun of the danger. Adela had come from the corner to which she had retreated, and joined the group. She laid her hand on Harry's arm, and he saw that she was pale as death.

"Don't go," she said.

As if to enforce her words, the street-door, which, I suppose, William had not shut properly, burst open with a bang against the wall, and the wind went shrieking through the house. as if in triumph at having forced an entrance.

"The woman is in labour," said Harry in reply to Adela, forgetting, in the stern reality both for the poor woman and himself, that girls of Adela's age and social position are not accustomed to hear such facts so plainly expressed, from a man's lips. Adela, however, simply accepted the fact, and replied :

"But you will be too late anyhow."

"Perhaps just in time," he answered, as his brother entered with a coat over his arm.

"Ralph," he went on, with a laugh, "they are trying to persuade me not to go."

"It is a tempting of Providence," said Mrs. Bloomfield.

"Harry, my boy," said the curate solemnly, "I would rather have you brought home dead to-morrow, than see you sitting by that fire five minutes after your mare comes. But you'll put on a great-coat?"

"No, thank you. I shall do much better without one. How comical I shall look in Farmer Prishig's Sunday clothes! I'm not going to be lost this storm, Mrs. Bloomfield; for I second-see myself at this moment, sitting by the farmer's kitchen fire, in certain habiliments a world too wide for my unshrunk shanks, but doing my best to be worthy of them by the attention I am paying to my supper."

Here he stooped to Lizzie and whispered in her ear :

"Don't let them make a fuss about my going. There is really no particular danger. And I don't want my patient there frightened and thrown back, you know."

Mrs. Armstrong nodded a promise. In a moment more, Harry had changed his coat; for the storm had swept away ceremony at least. Lizzie ran and brought him a glass of wine; but he begged for a glass of milk instead, and was soon supplied; after which he buttoned up his coat, tightened the straps of his spurs, which had been brought slack on his boots, put on one of a thick pair of gloves which he found in his brother's

coat, bade them all good-night, drew on the other glove, and stood prepared to go.

Did he or did he not see Adela's eyes gazing out of her pale face with an expression of admiring apprehension, as she stood bending forward, and looking up at the strong man about to fight the storm, and all ready to meet it? I don't know. I only put it to his conscience.

In a moment more, the knock came again—the only sign, for no one could hear the mare's hoofs in the wind and snow. With one glance and one good-night, he hurried out. The wind once more, for a brief moment, held an infernal carnival in the house. They crowded to the window—saw a dim form heave up on horseback, and presently vanish. All space lay beyond; but, for them, he was swallowed up by the jaws of the darkness. They knew no more. A flash of pride in his brother shot from Ralph's eyes, as, with restrained excitement, for which he sought some outlet, he walked towards the piano. His wife looked at Ralph with the same light of pride, tempered by thankfulness; for she knew, if he had been sent for, he would have gone all the same as Harry; but then he was not such a horseman as his brother. The fact was, he had neither seat nor hands, though no end of pluck.

"He will have to turn back," said the colonel. "He can't reach Cropstone Farm to-night. It lies right across the moor. It is impossible."

"Impossible things are always being done," said the curate, "else the world would have been all moor by this time."

"The wind is dead against him," said the schoolmaster.

"Better in front than in flank," said the colonel. "It won't blow him out of the saddle."

Adela had crept back to her corner, where she sat shading her eyes, and listening. I saw that her face was very pale. Lizzie joined her, and began talking to her.

I had not much fear for Harry, for I could not believe that his hour was come yet. I had great confidence in him and his mare. And I believed in the God that made Harry and the mare, and the storm too, through which he had sent them to the aid of one who was doing her part to keep his world going.

But now Mr. Armstrong had found a vent for his excitement in another of his winter songs, which might be very well for his mood, though it was not altogether suited to that of some of the rest of us. He sang—

“ Oh wildly wild the winter-blast
Is whirling round the snow ;
The wintry storms are up at last,
And care not how they go.

“ In wreaths and mists, the frozen white
Is torn into the air ;
It pictures, in the dreary light,
An ocean in despair.

“ Come, darkness ! rouse the fancy more ;
Storm ! wake the silent sea ;
Till, roaring in the tempest-roar,
It rave to ecstasy ;

“ And death-like figures, long and white,
Sweep through the driving spray ;
And, fading in the ghastly night,
Cry faintly far away.”

I saw Adela shudder. Presently she asked her papa whether it was not time to go home. Mrs. Armstrong proposed that she should stay all night ; but she evidently wished to go. It would be rather perilous work to drive down the hill with the wind behind, in such a night, but a servant was sent to hasten the carriage notwithstanding. The colonel and Percy and I ran along side of it, ready to render any assistance that might

be necessary ; and, although we all said we had never been out in such an uproar of the elements, we reached home in safety.

As Adela bade us good-night in the hall, I certainly felt very uneasy as to the effects of the night's adventures upon her—she looked so pale and wretched.

She did not come down to breakfast.

But she appeared at lunch, nothing the worse, and in very good spirits.

If I did not think that this had something to do with another fact I have come to the knowledge of since, I don't know that the particulars of the evening need have been related so minutely. The other fact was this : that in the grey dawn of the morning, by which time the snow had ceased, though the wind still blew, Adela saw from her window a weary rider and wearier horse pass the house, going up the street. The heads of both were sunk low. You might have thought the poor mare was looking for something she had lost last night in the snow ; and perhaps it was not all fatigue with Harry Armstrong. Perhaps he was giving thanks that he had saved two lives instead of losing his own. He was not so absorbed, however, but that he looked up at the house as he passed, and I believe he saw the blind of her window drop back into its place.

But how did she come to be looking out just at the moment ?

If a lady has not slept all night, and has looked out of window ninety-nine times before, it is not very wonderful that at the hundredth time she should see what she was looking for ; that is, if the object desired has not been lost in the snow, or drowned in a moorland pit ; neither of which had happened to Harry Armstrong. Nor is it unlikely that, after seeing what she has watched for, she will fall too fast asleep to be roused by the breakfast bell.

CHAPTER XII.

PERCY AND HIS MOTHER.

AT luncheon, the colonel said—

“Well, Adela, you will be glad to know that our hero of last night returned quite safe this morning.”

“I am glad to know it, papa.”

“He is one of the right sort, that young fellow. Duty is the first thing with him.”

“Perhaps duty may not have been his only motive,” said Mrs. Cathcart, coldly. “It was too good an opportunity to be lost.”

Adela seemed to understand her, for she blushed—but not with embarrassment alone, for the fire that made her cheek glow red, flashed in flames from her eyes.

“Some people, aunt,” she said, trying to follow the cold tone in which Mrs. Cathcart had spoken, “have not the faculty for the perception of the noble and self-denying. Their own lives are so habitually elevated, that they see nothing remarkable in the devotion of others.”

“Well, I do see nothing remarkable in it,” returned the aunt, in a tone that indicated she hardly knew what to make of Adela’s sarcasm. “Mr. Armstrong would have been liable to an action at law if he had refused to go. And then to come into the drawing-room in his boots and spurs, and

change his coat before ladies !—It was all just of a piece with the coarse speech he made to you when you were simple enough to ask him not to go. I can't think what you admire about the man, I am sure."

Adela rose and left the room.

"You are too hard on Mr. Armstrong," said the colonel.

"Perhaps I am, Colonel; but I have my reasons. If you will be blind to your daughter's interests, that is only the more reason why I should keep my eyes open to them."

So saying, Mrs. Cathcart rose, and followed her niece—out of the room, but no farther, I will venture to say. Fierce as the aunt was, there had been that in the niece's eyes, as she went, which I do not believe the vulgar courage of the aunt could have faced.

I concluded that Mrs. Cathcart had discovered Adela's restlessness the night before; had very possibly peeped into her room; and as her windows looked in the same direction, might have seen Harry riding home from his selfish task in the cold grey morning; for scheming can destroy the rest of some women as perfectly as loving can destroy the rest of others. She might have made the observation, too, that Adela had lain as still as a bird unhatched, after that apparition of weariness had passed.

The colonel again sank into an uncomfortable mood. He had loved his dead brother very dearly, and had set his heart on marrying Adela to Percy. Besides there was quite enough of worldliness left in the heart of the honourable old soldier, to make him feel that a country practitioner, of very moderate means, was not to be justified in aspiring to the hand of his daughter. Moreover, he could hardly endure the thought of his daughter's marriage at all, for he had not a little of the old man's jealousy in him; and the notion of Percy being her husband was the only form in which the thought

could present itself, that was in the least degree endurable to him. Yet he could not help admiring Harry; and until his thoughts had been turned into their present channel by Mrs. Cathcart's remarks, he had felt that that lady was unjust to the doctor. But to think that his line, for he had no son, should merge into that of the Armstrongs, who were of somewhat dubious descent in his eyes, and Scotch, too—though, by the way, his own line was Scotch, a few hundred years back—was sufficient to cause him very considerable uneasiness—*pain* would be the more correct word.

I have, for many pages, said very little about Percy; simply because there has been very little to say about him. He was always present at our readings, but did not appear to take any interest in them. He would generally lie on a couch, and stare either at Adela or the fire till he fell asleep. If he did not succeed in getting to sleep, he would show manifest signs of being bored. No doubt he considered the whole affair a piece of sentimental humbug. And during the day I saw very little of him. He had hunted once or twice, on one of his uncle's horses; they had scarcely seen the hounds this season. But that was a bore, no doubt. He went skating occasionally, and had once tried to get Adela to accompany him; but she would not. These amusements, with a few scattered hours of snipe-shooting, composed his Christmas enjoyments; the intervals being filled up with yawning, teasing the dogs, growling at his mother and the cold, and sleeping "the innocent sleep."

Whether he had any real regard for Adela, I could not quite satisfy myself—I mean *real* by the standard and on the scale of his own being; for of course, as compared with the love of men like the Armstrongs, the attachment of a lad like Percy could hardly be considered *real* at all. But even that, as I say, I could not clearly find out. His jealousy seemed rather the jealousy of what was his, or ought to be his, than any more

profound or tragical feeling. But he evidently disliked the doctor—and the curate, too, whether for his own sake or for the doctor's, is of little consequence.

In the course of this forenoon, I came upon Master Percy in the kitchen garden. He had set an old shutter against one of the walls for a target, and was peppering away at it with a revolver; apparently quite satisfied if he succeeded in hitting the same panel twice running, at twelve paces. Guessing at the nonsense that was in his head, I sauntered up to him, and watched his practice for a while. He pulled the trigger with a jerk that threw the muzzle up half an inch every time he fired, else I don't believe he would have hit the board at all. But he held his breath beforehand, till he was red in the face, because he had heard that, in firing at a mark, pistol-shooters did not even breathe, to avoid the influence of the motion of the chest upon the aim.

"Ah!" I said, "pretty well. But you should see Mr. Henry Armstrong shoot."

Whereupon Mr. Percy Cathcart deliberately damned Mr. Henry Armstrong, expressly and by name. I pretended not to have heard him, and, continuing to regard the said condemned as still alive and comfortable, went on:

"Just ask him, the next time you find him at home, to let you see him drive a nail with three pistol-bullets."

He threw the pistol from him, exploded himself, like a shell, in twenty different fragments of oaths, and left me the kitchen garden and the pistol, which latter I took a little practice with myself, for the sake of emptying two of the chambers still charged. Whether Henry Armstrong even knew how to fire a pistol, I did not know; but I dare say he was a first-rate shot, if I only had known it. I sent the pistol up to Mr. Percy's room by the hand of Mr. Beeves; but I never heard him practising any more.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CURATE'S SECOND STORY.

THE next night the curate was to read us another story. The time arrived, and with it all our company, except Harry. Indeed it was a marvel that he had been able to attend so often as he had attended. I presume the severe weather had by this time added to his sick-list.

Although I fear the chief end of our readings was not so fully attained as hitherto, or, in other words, that Adela did not enjoy the evening so much as usual, I will yet record all with my usual faithfulness.

The curate and his wife were a little late, and when they arrived, they found us waiting for them in music. As soon as they entered, Adela rose from the piano.

‘Do go on, Miss Cathcart,’ said the curate.

‘I had just finished,’ she replied.

‘Then, if you will allow me, I will sing a song first, which I think will act as an antidote to those sentimental ones which we had at my house, and of which Mrs. Cathcart did not approve.’

‘Thank you,’ said everybody, Mrs. Cathcart included.

Whereupon the curate sang :

“ I am content. In trumpet-tones,
My song, let people know.
And many a mighty man, with throne
And sceptre, is not so.

And if he is, I joyful cry,
Why then, he's just the same as I.

"The Mogul's gold, the Sultan's show—
His bliss, supreme too soon,
Who, lord of all the world below,
Looked up unto the moon—
I would not pick it up—all that
Is only fit for laughing at.

"My motto is—*Content with this.*
Gold—place—I prize not such.
That which I have, my measure
Wise men desire not much.
Men wish and wish, and have their will,
And wish again, as hungry still.

"And gold and honour are besides
A very brittle glass ;
And Time, in his unresting tides,
Makes all things change and pass ;
Turns riches to a beggar's dole ;
Sets glory's race an infant's goal.

"Be noble—that is more than wealth ;
Do right—that's more than place ;
Then in the spirit there is health
And gladness in the face ;
Then thou art with thyself at one,
And, no man hating, fearest none.

"I am content. In trumpet-tones,
My song, let people know.
And many a mighty man, with throne
And sceptre, is not so.
And if he is, I joyful cry,
Why then, he's just the same as I."

"Is that one of your own, Mr. Armstrong?" asked the colonel.

"It is, like most of those you have heard from me and my brother, only a translation."

"I am no judge of poetry, but it seems to me that if he was content, he need not say so much about it."

"There is something in what you say. But there was no show-off in Claudius, I think. He was a most simple-hearted, amiable man, to all appearance. A man of business, too—manager of a bank at Altona, in the beginning of the present century. But as I have not given a favourable impression of him, allow me to repeat a little bit of innocent humour of his—a cradle song—which I like fully better than the other."

"Most certainly ; it is only fair," answered the colonel.

"Sleep, baby boy, sleep sweet, secure ;
Thou art thy father's miniature ;
That art thou, though thy father goes
And swears that thou hast not his nose.

"A moment gone, he looked at thee,
My little budding rose,
And said—No doubt there's much of me,
But he has not my nose.

"I think myself, it is too small,
But it is *his* nose after all ;
For if thy nose his nose be not,
Whence came the nose that thou hast got ?

"Sleep, baby, sleep ; don't half-way doze :
To tease me—that's his part.
No matter if you've not his nose,
So be you've got his heart !"

Every one liked this, except Mrs. Cathcart, who opined, with her usual smile, that it was rather silly.

"Well, I hope a father may be silly sometimes," said the curate, with a glance at his wife, which she did not acknow-

ledge. "At least I fear I should be silly enough, if I were a father."

No more remarks were made, and as it was now quite time to begin the story, Mr. Armstrong took his place, and the rest took their places. He began at once.

* * * * *

"A capital story!" cried our host, the moment he ended. "But you should not have killed him. You should have made a general of him. By heaven! he deserved it."

Mr. Armstrong was evidently much pleased that the colonel so heartily sympathized with his tale. And every one else added some words of commendation. I could not help thinking with myself that he had only embodied the story of his own life in other more striking forms. But I knew that, if I said so, he would laugh at me, and answer that all he had done was quite easy to do—he had found no difficulty in it; whereas this man was a hero and did the thing that he found very difficult indeed. Still I was sure that the story was at least the outgrowth of his own mind.

"May we ask," I said, "how much of the tale is fact?"

"I am sorry it is not all fact," he answered.

"Tell us how much, then," I said.

"Well, I will tell you what made me write it. I heard an old lady at a dinner-table mention that she had once known a young officer who had his sword broken over his head, and was dismissed from the army, for cowardice. I began trying first to understand his feelings; then to see how the thing could have happened; and then to discover what could be done for him. And hence the story. That was all, I am sorry to say."

"I thought as much," I rejoined.

"Will you excuse me if I venture to make a remark?" said Mrs. Bloomfield.

"With all my heart," answered the curate.

"It seemed to me that there was nothing Christian in the story. And I cannot help feeling that a clergyman might, therefore, have done better."

"I allow that in words there is nothing Christian," answered Mr. Armstrong; "and I am quite ready to allow also that it might have been better if something of the kind you mean had been expressed in it. The whole thing, however, is only a sketch. But I cannot allow that, in spirit and scope, it is anything other than Christian, or indeed anything but Christian. It seems to me that the whole might be used as a Christian parable."

While the curate spoke, I had seen Adela's face flush; but the cause was not *visible* to me. As he uttered the last words, a hand was laid on his shoulder, and Harry's voice said:

"At your parables again, Ralph?"

He had come in so gently that the only sign of his entrance had been the rose-light on Adela's cheeks.—Was he the sun? And was she a cloud of the east?

"Glad to see you safe amongst us again," said the colonel, backed by almost every one of the company.

"What's your quarrel with my parables, Harry?" said the curate.

"Quarrel? None at all. They are the delight of my heart. I only wish you would give our friends one of your best—*The Castle*, for instance."

"Not yet a while, Harry. It is not my turn for some time, I hope. Perhaps Miss Cathcart will be tired of the whole affair, before it comes round to me again."

"Then I shall deserve to be starved of stories all the rest of my life," answered Adela, laughing.

"If you will allow me, then," said Harry, "I will give you a parable, called *The Lost Church*, from the German poet, Uhland."

"Softly, Harry," said his brother; "you are ready enough with what is not yours to give; but where is your own story that you promised, and which indeed we should have a right to demand, whether you had promised it or not?"

"I am working at it, Ralph, in my spare moments, which are not very many; and I want to choose the right sort of night to tell it in, too. This one wouldn't do at all. There's no moon."

"If it is a horrid story, it is a pity you did not read it last time, before you set out to cross the moor."

"Oh, that night would not have done at all. A night like that drives all fear out of one's head. But indeed it is not finished yet. May I repeat the parable now, Miss Cathcart?"

"What do you mean by a *parable*, Mr. Henry?" interrupted Mrs. Cathcart. "It sounds rather profane to me."

"I mean a picture in words, where more is meant than meets the ear."

"But why call it a parable?"

"Because it is one."

"Why not speak in plain words then?"

"Because a good parable is plainer than the plainest words. You remember what Tennyson says—that

' Truth embodied in a tale
Shall enter in at lowly doors ' ? "

"Goethe," said the curate, "has a little parable about poems, which is equally true about parables—

' Poems are painted window-panes.
If one looks from the square into the church,
Dusk and dimness are his gains—
Sir Philistine is left in the lurch.
The sight, so seen, may well enrage him,
Nor any words henceforth assuage him.

‘ But come just inside what conceals ;
Cross the holy threshold quite—
All at once, ’tis rainbow-bright ;
Device and story flash to light ;
A gracious splendour truth reveals.
This, to God’s children, is full measure ;
It edifies and gives them pleasure.’ ”

“ I can’t follow that,” said Adela.

“ I will write it out for you,” said Harry ; “ and then you will be able to follow it perfectly.”

“ Thank you very much. Now for your parable.”

“ It is called *The Lost Church* ; and I assure you it is full of meaning.”

“ I hope I shall be able to find it out.”

“ You will find the more the longer you think about it.

‘ Oft in the far wood, overhead,
Tones of a bell are heard obscurely ;
How old the sounds no sage has said,
Or yet explained the story surely.
From the lost church, the legend saith,
Out on the winds, the ringing goeth ;
Once full of pilgrims was the path—
Now where to find it, no one knoweth.

‘ Deep in the wood I lately went,
Where no foot-trodden path is lying ;
From the time’s woe and discontent,
My heart went forth to God in sighing.
When in the forest’s wild repose,
I heard the ringing somewhat clearer ;
The higher that my longing rose,
Downward it rang the fuller, nearer.

‘ So on its thoughts my heart did brood,
My sense was with the sound so busy,
That I have never understood
How I clomb up the height so dizzy.

To me it seemed a hundred years
Had passed away in dreaming, sighing—
When lo ! high o'er the clouds, appears
An open space in sunlight lying.

' The heaven, dark-blue, above it bowed ;
The sun shone o'er it, large and glowing ;
Beneath, a minster's structure proud
Stood in the gold light, golden showing.
It seemed on those great clouds, sun-clear,
Aloft to hover, as on pinions ;
Its spire-point seemed to disappear,
Melting away in high dominions.

' The bell's clear tones, entrancing, full—
The quivering tower, they, booming, swung it ;
No human hand the rope did pull—
The holy storm-winds sweeping rung it.
The storm, the stream, came down, came near,
And seized my heart with longing holy ;
Into the church I went, with fear,
With trembling step, and gladness lowly.

' The threshold crossed—I cannot show
What in me moved ; words cannot paint it.
Both dark and clear, the windows glow
With noble forms of martyrs sainted.
I gazed and saw—transfigured glory !
The pictures swell and break their barriers ;
I saw the world and all its story
Of holy women, holy warriors.

' Down at the altar I sank slowly ;
My heart was like the face of Stephen.
Aloft, upon the arches holy,
Shone out in gold the glow of heaven.
I prayed ; I looked again ; and lo !
The dome's high sweep had flown asunder ;
The heavenly gates wide open go ;
And every veil unveils a wonder.

‘ What gloriousness I then beheld,
Kneeling in prayer, silent and wondrous,
What sounds triumphant on me swelled,
Like organs and like trumpets thunderous—
My mortal words can never tell ;
But who for such is sighing sorest,
Let him give heed unto the bell
That dimly soundeth in the forest.’ ”

“ Splendid ! ” cried the schoolmaster, with enthusiasm.

“ What is the lost church ? ” asked Mrs. Cathcart.

“ No one can tell, but him who finds it, like the poet,” answered the curate.

“ But I suppose *you* at least consider it the Church of England,” returned the lady with one of her sweetest attempts at a smile.

“ God forbid ! ” exclaimed the clergyman, with a kind of sacred horror.

“ Not the Church of England ! ” cried Mrs. Cathcart, in a tone of horror likewise, dashed with amazement.

“ No, madam—the Church of God ; the great cathedral-church of the universe ; of which Church I trust the Church of England is a little Jesus-chapel.”

“ God bless you, Mr. Armstrong ! ” cried the schoolmaster.

The colonel likewise showed some sign of emotion. Mrs. Cathcart looked set-down and indignant. Percy stared. Adela and Harry looked at each other.

“ Whoever finds God in his own heart,” said the clergyman, solemnly, “ has found the lost Church—the Church of God.”

And he looked at Adela as he spoke. She cast down her eyes, and thanked him with her heart.

A silence followed.

“ Harry, you must come up with your story next time—positively,” said Mr. Armstrong at length.

"I don't think I can. I cannot undertake to do so, at all events."

"Then what is to be done? I have it. Lizzie, my dear, you have got that story you wrote once for a Christmas paper, have you not?"

"Yes, I have, Ralph; but that is far too slight a thing to be worth reading here."

"It will do at least to give Harry a chance for his. I mustn't praise it 'afore fowk,' you know."

"But it was never quite finished—at least so people said."

"Well, you can finish it to-morrow well enough."

"I haven't time."

"You needn't be working at that — all day long and every day. There is no such hurry."

The blank indicates a certain cessation of intelligible sound occasioned by the close application of Lizzie's palm to Ralph's lips. She did not dare, however, to make any further opposition to his request.

"I think we have some claim on you, Mrs. Armstrong," said the host. "It will be my sister's turn next time, and after that Percy's."

Percy gave a great laugh; and his mother said, with a slight toss of her head:

"I am not so fond of being criticized myself!"

"Has criticism been *your* occupation, Mrs. Cathcart," I said, "during our readings? If so, then indeed we have a claim on you greater than I had supposed."

She could not hide some degree of confusion and annoyance. But I had had my revenge, and I had no wish for her story; so I said nothing more.

We parted with the understanding that Mrs. Armstrong would read her story on the following Monday.

Again, before he took his leave, Mr. Harry had a little thera-

peutic *tête-à-tête* with Miss Adela, which lasted about two minutes, Mrs. Cathcart watching them every second of the time, with her eyes as round and wide as she could make them, for they were by nature very long, and by art very narrow, for she rarely opened them to any width at all. They were not pleasant eyes, those eyes of Mrs. Cathcart's. Percy's were like them, only better, for though they had a reddish tinge, he did open them wider.

CHAPTER XIV.

MY UNCLE PETER.

"WHY don't you write a story, Percy?" said his mother to him next morning at breakfast.

"Plenty of quill-driving at Somerset-House, mother. I prefer something else in the holidays."

"But I don't like to see you showing to disadvantage, Percy," said his uncle kindly. "Why don't you try?"

"The doctor-fellow hasn't read one yet. And I don't think he will."

"Have patience. I think he will."

"I don't care. I don't want to hear it. It's all a confounded bore. They're nothing but goody humbug, or sentimental whining. His would be sure to smell of black draught. I'm not partial to drugs."

The mother frowned, and the uncle tried to smile kindly and excusingly. Percy rose and left the room.

"You see he's jealous of the doctor," remarked his mother, with an upward toss of the head.

The colonel did not reply, and I ventured no remark.

"There is a vein of essential vulgarity in both the brothers," said the lady.

"I don't think so," returned the colonel; and there the conversation ended.

Adela was practising at her piano the greater part of the day. The weather would not admit of a walk.

When we were all seated once more for our reading and Mrs. Armstrong had her paper in her hand, after a little delay of apparent irresolution, she said all at once :

“Ralph, I can’t read. Will you read it for me?”

“Do try to read it yourself, my dear,” said her husband.

“I am sure I shall break down,” she answered.

“If you were able to write it, surely you are able to read it,” said the colonel. “I know what my difficulty would be.”

“It is a very different thing to read one’s own writing. I could read anything else well enough. Will you read it for me, Henry?”

“With pleasure, if it must be any other than yourself. I know your handwriting nearly as well as my own. It’s none of your usual lady-hands—all point and no character. But what do you say, Ralph?”

“Read it by all means, if she will have it so. The company has had enough of my reading. It will be a change of voice at least.”

I saw that Adela looked pleasedly expectant.

“Pray don’t look for much,” said Mrs. Armstrong in a pleading tone. “I assure you it is nothing, or at best a mere trifle. But I could not help myself, without feeling obstinate. And my husband lays so much on the cherished obstinacy of Lady Macbeth, holding that to be the key to her character, that he has terrified me from every indulgence of mine.”

She laughed very sweetly; and her husband joining in the laugh, all further hindrance was swept away in the music of their laughter; and Harry, taking the papers from his sister’s hand, commenced at once. It was partly in print, and partly in manuscript.

“MY UNCLE PETER.”

“I will tell you the story of my Uncle Peter, who was born on Christmas Day. He was very anxious to die on Christmas Day as well; but I must confess that was rather ambitious in Uncle Peter. Shakespeare is said to have been born on St. George’s Day, and there is some ground for believing that he died on St. George’s Day. He thus fulfilled a cycle. But we cannot expect that of any but great men, and Uncle Peter was not a great man, though I think I shall be able to show that he was a good man. The only pieces of selfishness I ever discovered in him were, his self-gratulation at having been born on Christmas Day, and the ambition with regard to his death, which I have just recorded; and that this selfishness was not of a kind to be very injurious to his fellow-men, I think I shall be able to show as well.

“The first remembrance that I have of him, is his taking me one Christmas Eve to the largest toy-shop in London, and telling me to choose any toy whatever that I pleased. He little knew the agony of choice into which this request of his,—for it was put to me as a request, in the most polite, loving manner,—threw his astonished nephew. If a general right of choice from the treasures of the whole world had been unanimously voted me, it could hardly have cast me into greater perplexity. I wandered about, staring like a distracted ghost at the ‘wealth of Ormus and of Ind,’ displayed about me. Uncle Peter followed me with perfect patience; nay, I believe, with a delight that equalled my perplexity, for, every now and then when I looked round to him with a silent appeal for sympathy in the distressing dilemma into which he had thrown me, I found him rubbing his hands and spiritually chuckling over his victim. Nor would he volunteer the least assistance to save me from the dire consequences of too much liberty.

How long I was in making up my mind I cannot tell ; but as I look back upon this splendour of my childhood, I feel as if I must have wandered for weeks through interminable forest-alleys of toy-bearing trees. As often as I read the story of Aladdin—and I read it now and then still, for I have children about, and their books about—the subterranean orchard of jewels always brings back to my inward vision the inexhaustible riches of the toy-shop to which Uncle Peter took me that Christmas Eve. As soon as, in despair of choosing well, I had made a desperate plunge at decision, my Uncle Peter, as if to forestall any supervention of repentance, began buying like a maniac, giving me everything that took his fancy or mine, till we and our toys nearly filled the cab which he called to take us home.

“Uncle Peter was a little round man, not *very* fat, resembling both in limbs and features an overgrown baby. And I believe the resemblance was not merely an external one ; for, though his intellect was quite up to par, he retained a degree of simplicity of character and of tastes that was not childlike only, but bordered, sometimes, upon the childish. To look at him, you could not have fancied a face or a figure with less of the romantic about them ; yet I believe that the whole region of his brain was held in fee-simple, whatever that may mean, by a race of fairy architects, who built aerial castles therein, regardless of expense. His imagination was the most distinguishing feature of his character. And to hear him defend any of his extravagancies, it would appear that he considered himself especially privileged in that respect. ‘Ah, my dear,’ he would say to my mother when she expostulated with him on making some present far beyond the small means he at that time possessed, ‘ah, my dear, you see I was born on Christmas Day.’ Many a time he would come in from town where he was a clerk in a merchant’s office, with the water

running out of his boots, and his umbrella carefully tucked under his arm; and we would know very well that he had given the last coppers he had, for his omnibus home, to some beggar or crossing-sweeper, and had then been so delighted with the pleasure he had given, that he forgot to make the best of it by putting up his umbrella. Home he would trudge, in his worn suit of black, with his steel watch-chain and bunch of ancestral seals swinging and ringing from his fob, and the rain running into his trousers pockets, to the great endangerment of the health of his cherished old silver watch, which never went wrong because it was put right every day by St. Paul's. He was quite poor then, as I have said. I do not think he had more than a hundred pounds a year, and he must have been five-and-thirty. I suppose his employers showed their care for the morals of their clerks, by never allowing them any margin to mis-spend. But Uncle Peter lived in constant hope and expectation of some unexampled good luck befalling him; 'For,' said he, 'I was born on Christmas Day.'

"He was never married. When people used to jest with him about being an old bachelor, he used to smile, for anything would make him smile; but I was a very little boy indeed when I began to observe that the smile on such occasions was mingled with sadness, and that Uncle Peter's face looked very much as if he were going to cry. But he never said anything on the subject, and not even my mother knew whether he had had any love story or not. I have often wondered whether his goodness might not come in part from his having lost some one very dear to him, and having his life on earth purified by the thoughts of her life in heaven. But I never found out. After his death—for he did die, though not on Christmas Day—I found a lock of hair folded in paper with a date on it—that was all—in a secret drawer of his old desk.

The date was far earlier than my first recollections of him. I reverentially burnt it with fire.

“He lived in lodgings by himself not far from our house; and, when not with us, was pretty sure to be found seated in his easy-chair, for he was fond of his simple comforts, beside a good fire, reading by the light of one candle. He had his tea always as soon as he came home, and some buttered toast or a hot muffin, of which he was sure to make me eat three-quarters if I chanced to drop in upon him at the right hour, which, I am rather ashamed to say, I not unfrequently did. He dared not order another, as I soon discovered. Yet, I fear, that did not abate my appetite for what there was. You see, I was never so good as Uncle Peter. When he had finished his tea, he turned his chair to the fire, and read—what do you think? *Sensible Travels and Discoveries*, or *Political Economy*, or *Popular Geology*? No: *Fairy Tales*, as many as he could lay hold of; and when they failed him, *Romances* or *Novels*. Almost anything in this way would do that was not bad. I believe he had read every word of Richardson’s novels, and most of Fielding’s and De Foe’s. But once I saw him throw a volume in the fire, which he had been fidgeting over for a while. I was just finishing a sum I had brought across to him to help me with. I looked up, and saw the volume in the fire. The heat made it writhe open, and I saw the author’s name, and that was *Sterne*. He had bought it at a book-stall as he came home. He sat awhile, and then got up and took down his Bible, and began reading a chapter in the New Testament, as if for an antidote to the book he had destroyed.”

“I put in that piece,” said the curate.

“But Uncle Peter’s luck came at last—at least, he thought it did, when he received a lawyer’s letter announcing the *demise* of a cousin of whom he had heard little for a great

many years, although they had been warm friends while at school together. This cousin had been brought up to some trade in the wood line—had been a cooper or a carpenter, and had somehow or other got landed in India, and, though not in the Company's service, had contrived in one way and another to amass what might be called a large fortune in any rank of life. I am afraid to mention the amount of it, lest it should throw discredit on my story. The whole of this fortune he left to Uncle Peter, for he had no nearer relation, and had always remembered him with affection.

"I happened to be seated beside my uncle when the lawyer's letter arrived. He was reading 'Peter Wilkins.' He laid down the book with reluctance, thinking the envelope contained some advertisement of slaty coal for his kitchen-fire, or cottony silk for his girls' dresses. Fancy my surprise when my little uncle jumped up on his chair, and thence on the table, upon which he commenced a sort of demoniac horn-pipe. But that sober article of furniture declined giving its support to such proceedings for a single moment, and fell with an awful crash to the floor. My uncle was dancing amidst its ruins like Nero in blazing Rome, when he was reduced to an awful sense of impropriety by the entrance of his landlady. I was sitting in open-mouthed astonishment at my uncle's extravagance, when he suddenly dropped into his chair, like a lark into its nest, leaving heaven silent. But silence did not reign long.

"*Well!* Mr. Belper,' began his landlady, in a tone as difficult of description as it is easy of conception, for her fists had already planted themselves in her own opposing sides. But, to my astonishment, my uncle was not in the least awed, although I am sure, however much he tried to hide it, that I have often seen him tremble in his shoes at the distant roar of this tigress. But it is wonderful how much courage a pocket-

ful of sovereigns will give. It is far better for rousing the pluck of a man than any number of bottles of wine in his head. What a brave thing a whole fortune must be then !

“ ‘ Take that rickety old thing away,’ said my uncle.

“ ‘ Rickety, Mr. Belper ! I’m astonished to hear a decent gentleman like you slander the very table as you’ve eaten off for the last—’

“ ‘ We won’t be precise to a year, ma’am,’ interrupted my uncle.

“ ‘ And if you will have little scapegraces of neveys into my house to break the furniture, why, them as breaks, pays, Mr. Belper.’

“ ‘ Very well. Of course I will pay for it. I broke it myself, ma’am ; and if you don’t get out of my room, I’ll—’

“ Uncle Peter jumped up once more, and made for the heap of ruins in the middle of the floor. The landlady vanished in a moment, and my uncle threw himself again into his chair, and absolutely roared with laughter.

“ ‘ Shan’t we have rare fun, Charlie, my boy?’ said he at last, and went off into another fit of laughter.

“ ‘ Why, uncle, what is the matter with you?’ I managed to say, in utter bewilderment.

“ ‘ Nothing but luck, Charlie. It’s gone to my head. I’m not used to it, Charlie, that’s all. I’ll come all right by-and-by. Bless you, my boy !’

“ What do you think was the first thing my uncle did to relieve himself of the awful accession of power which had just befallen him? The following morning he gathered together every sixpence he had in the house, and went out of one grocer’s shop into another, and out of one baker’s shop into another, until he had changed the whole into threepenny pieces. Then he walked to town, as usual, to business. But one or two of his friends who were walking the same way, and followed behind

him, could not think what Mr. Belper was about. Every crossing that he came to he made use of to cross to the other side. He crossed and recrossed the same street twenty times, they said. But at length they observed, that, with a legerdemain worthy of a professor, he slipped something into every sweeper's hand as he passed him. It was one of the three-penny pieces. When he walked home in the evening, he had nothing to give, and besides went through one of the wet experiences to which I have already alluded. To add to his discomfort, he found, when he got home, that his tobacco-jar was quite empty, so that he was forced to put on his wet shoes again—for he never, to the end of his days, had more than one pair at a time—in order to come across to my mother to borrow sixpence. Before the legacy was paid to him, he went through a good many of the tortures which result from being 'a king and no king.' The inward consciousness and the outward possibility did not in the least correspond. At length, after much manœuvring with the lawyers, who seemed to sympathize with the departed cousin in this, that they too would prefer keeping the money till death parted them and it, he succeeded in getting a thousand pounds of it on Christmas Eve.

"'NOW!' said Uncle Peter, in enormous capitals.—That night a thundering knock came to our door. We were all sitting in our little dining-room—father, mother, and seven children of us—talking about what we should do next day. The door opened, and in came the most grotesque figure you could imagine. It was seven feet high at least, without any head, a mere walking tree-stump, as far as shape went, only it looked soft. The little ones were terrified, but not the bigger ones of us; for from top to toe (if it had a toe) it was covered with toys of every conceivable description, fastened on to it somehow or other. It was a perfect treasure-cave of Ali Baba turned inside out. We shrieked with delight. The figure

stood perfectly still, and we gathered round it in a group to have a nearer view of the wonder. We then discovered that there were tickets on all the articles, which we supposed at first to record the price of each. But, upon still closer examination, we discovered that every one of the tickets had one or other of our names upon it. This caused a fresh explosion of joy. Nor was it the children only that were thus remembered. A little box bore my mother's name. When she opened it, we saw a real gold watch and chain, and seals and dangles of every sort, of useful and useless kind; and my mother's initials were on the back of the watch. My father had a silver flute, and to the music of it we had such a dance! the strange figure, now considerably lighter, joining in it without uttering a word. During the dance one of my sisters, a very sharp-eyed little puss, espied about half-way up the monster two bright eyes looking out of a shadowy depth of something like the skirts of a great coat. She peeped and peeped; and at length, with a perfect scream of exultation, cried out, 'It's Uncle Peter! It's Uncle Peter!' The music ceased; the dance was forgotten; we flew upon him like a pack of hungry wolves; we tore him to the ground; despoiled him of coats, and plaids, and elevating sticks; and discovered the kernel of the beneficent monster in the person of real Uncle Peter; which, after all, was the best present he could have brought us on Christmas Eve, for we had been very dull for want of him, and had been wondering why he did not come.

"But Uncle Peter had laid great plans for his birthday, and for the carrying out of them he took me into his confidence,—I being now a lad of fifteen, and partaking sufficiently of my uncle's nature to enjoy at least the fun of his benevolence. He had been for some time perfecting his information about a few of the families in the neighbourhood; for he was a bit of a gossip, and did not turn his landlady out of the room when

she came in with a whisper of news, in the manner in which he had turned her out when she came to expostulate about the table. But she knew her lodger well enough never to dare to bring him any scandal. From her he had learned that a certain artist in the neighbourhood was very poor. He made inquiry about him where he thought he could hear more, and finding that he was steady and hard-working (Uncle Peter never cared to inquire whether he had genius or not ; it was enough to him that the poor fellow's pictures did not sell), resolved that he should have a more pleasant Christmas than he expected. One other chief outlet for his brotherly love, in the present instance, was a dissenting minister and his wife, who had a large family of little children. They lived in the same street with himself. Uncle Peter was an unwavering adherent to the Church of England, but he would have felt himself a dissenter at once if he had excommunicated any one by withdrawing his sympathies from him. He knew that this minister was a thoroughly good man, and he had even gone to hear him preach once or twice. He knew too that his congregation was not the more liberal to him that he was liberal to all men. So he resolved that he would act the part of one of the black angels that brought bread and meat to Elijah in the wilderness. Uncle Peter would never have pretended to rank higher than one of the foresaid ravens.

“A great part of the forenoon of Christmas Day was spent by my uncle and me in preparations. The presents he had planned were many, but I will only mention two or three of them in particular. For the minister and his family he got a small bottle with a large mouth. This he filled as full of new sovereigns as it would hold ; labelled it outside, *Pickled Mushrooms* ; ‘for doesn't it grow in the earth without any seed?’ said he ; and then wrapped it up like a grocer's parcel. For the artist, he took a large shell from his chimney-piece ;

folded a fifty-pound note in a bit of paper, which he tied up with a green ribbon; inserted the paper in the jaws of the shell, so that the ends of the ribbon should hang out; folded it up in paper and sealed it; wrote outside, *Enquire within*; enclosed the whole in a tin box, and directed it, *With Christmas Day's compliments*; 'for wasn't I born on Christmas Day?' concluded Uncle Peter for the twentieth time that forenoon. Then there were a dozen or two of the best port he could get, for a lady who had just had a baby, and whose husband and his income he knew from business relations. Nor were the children forgotten. Every house in his street and ours in which he knew there were little ones, had a parcel of toys and sweet things prepared for it.

"As soon as the afternoon grew dusky, we set out with as many as we could carry. A slight disguise secured me from discovery, my duty being to leave the parcels at the different houses. In the case of the more valuable of them, my duty was to ask for the master or mistress, and see the packet in safe hands. In this I was successful in every instance. It must have been a great relief to my uncle when the number of parcels was sufficiently diminished to restore to him the use of his hands, for to him they were as necessary for rubbing as a tail is to a dog for wagging—in both cases for electrical reasons, no doubt. He dropped several parcels in the vain attempt to hold them and perform the usual frictional movement notwithstanding; so he was compelled instead to go through a kind of solemn pace, which got more and more rapid as the parcels decreased in number, till it became at last, in its wild movements, something like a Highlander's sword-dance. We had to go home several times for more, keeping the best till the last. When Uncle Peter saw me give the 'pickled mushrooms' into the hands of the lady of the house, he uttered a kind of laugh, strangled into a crow,

which startled the good lady, who was evidently rather alarmed already at the weight of the small parcel, for she said, with a scared look,—

“ ‘It’s not gunpowder, is it?’ ”

“ ‘No,’ I said ; ‘I think it’s shot.’ ”

“ ‘Shot !’ said she, looking even more alarmed. ‘Don’t you think you had better take it back again?’ ”

“She held out the parcel to me, and made as if she would shut the door.

“ ‘Why, ma’am,’ I answered, ‘you would not have me taken up for stealing it?’ ”

“It was a foolish reply ; but it answered the purpose if not the question. She kept the parcel and shut the door. When I looked round I saw my uncle going through a regular series of convolutions, corresponding exactly to the bodily contortions he must have executed at school every time he received a course of what they call *palmies* in Scotland ; if, indeed, Uncle Peter was ever even suspected of improper behaviour at school. It consisted first of a dance, then a double-up ; then another dance, then another double-up, and so on.

“ ‘Some stupid hoax, I suppose !’ said the artist, as I put the parcel into his hands. He looked gloomy enough, poor fellow.

“ ‘Don’t be too sure of that, if you please, sir,’ said I, and vanished.

“Everything was a good joke to uncle all that evening.

“ ‘Charlie,’ said he, ‘I never had such a birthday in my life before ; but, please God, now I’ve begun, this will not be the last of the sort. But, you young rascal, if you split, why, I’ll thrash the life out of you. No, I won’t—’ Here my uncle assumed a dignified attitude, and concluded with mock solemnity—‘No, I won’t. I will cut you off with a shilling.’ ”

“This was a *crescendo* passage, ending in a howl ; upon which

he commenced once more an edition of the Highland fling, with impromptu variations.

"When all the parcels were delivered, we walked home together to my uncle's lodgings, where he gave me a glass of wine and a sovereign for my trouble. I believe I felt as rich as any of them.

"But now I must tell you the romance of my uncle's life. I do not mean the suspected hidden romance, for that no one knew—except, indeed, a dead one knew all about it. It was a later romance, which, however, nearly cost him his life once.

"One Christmas Eve we had been occupied, as usual, with the presents of the following Christmas Day, and—will you believe it?—in the same lodgings, too, for my uncle was a thorough Tory in his hatred of change. Indeed, although two years had passed, and he had had the whole of his property at his disposal since the legal term of one year, he still continued to draw his salary of 100*l.* of Messrs. Buff and Codgers. One Christmas Eve, I say, I was helping him to make up parcels, when, from a sudden impulse, I said to him—

"'How good you are, uncle!'

"'Ha! ha! ha!' laughed he; 'that's the best joke of all. Good, my boy! Ha! ha! ha! Why, Charlie, you don't fancy I care one atom for all these people, do you? I do it all to please myself. Ha! ha! ha! It's the cheapest pleasure at the money, considering the quality, that I know. That *is* a joke. Good, indeed! Ha! ha! ha!'

"I am happy to say I was an old enough bird not to be caught with this metaphysical chaff. But my uncle's face grew suddenly very grave, even sad in its expression; and after a pause he resumed, but this time without any laughing:—

"'Good, Charlie! Why, I'm no use to anybody.'

"'You do me good, anyhow, uncle,' I answered. 'If I'm

not a better man for having you for an uncle, why I shall be a great deal the worse, that's all.'

" 'Why, there it is !' rejoined my uncle ; 'I don't know whether I do good or harm. But for you, Charlie, you're a good boy, and don't want any good done to you. It would break my heart, Charlie, if I thought you weren't a good boy.'

"He always called me a boy after I was a grown man. But then I believe he always felt like a boy himself, and quite forgot that we were uncle and nephew.

"I was silent, and he resumed,—

" 'I wish I could be of real, unmistakable use to any one ! But I fear I am not good enough to have that honour done me.'

"Next morning—that was Christmas Day—he went out for a walk alone, apparently oppressed with the thought with which the serious part of our conversation on the preceding evening had closed. Of course nothing less than a three-penny piece would do for a crossing-sweeper on Christmas Day ; but one tiny little girl touched his heart so that the usual coin was doubled. Still this did not relieve the heart of the giver sufficiently ; for the child looked up in his face in a way, whatever the way was, that made his heart ache. So he gave her a shilling. But he felt no better after that.—I am following his own account of feelings and circumstances.

" 'This won't do,' said Uncle Peter to himself. 'What is your name ?' said Uncle Peter to the little girl.

" 'Little Christmas,' she answered.

" 'Little Christmas !' exclaimed Uncle Peter. 'I see why that wouldn't do now. What do you mean ?'

" 'Little Christmas, sir ; please, sir.'

" 'Who calls you that ?'

" 'Everybody, sir.'

" 'Why do they call you that ?'

“ ‘It’s my name, sir.’

“ ‘What’s your father’s name?’

“ ‘I ain’t got none, sir.’

“ ‘But you know what his name was?’

“ ‘No, sir.’

“ ‘How did you get your name then? It must be the same as your father’s, you know.’

“ ‘Then I suppose my father was Christmas Day, sir, for I knows of none else. They always calls me Little Christmas.’

“ ‘H’m! A little sister of mine, I see,’ said Uncle Peter to himself.

“ ‘Well, who’s your mother?’

“ ‘My aunt, sir. She knows I’m out, sir.’

“ ‘There was not the least impudence in the child’s tone or manner in saying this. She looked up at him with her gipsy eyes in the most confident manner. She had not struck him in the least as beautiful; but the longer he looked at her, the more he was pleased with her.

“ ‘Is your aunt kind to you?’

“ ‘She gives me my wittles.’

“ ‘Suppose you did not get any money all day, what would she say to you?’

“ ‘Oh, she won’t give me a hidin’ to-day, sir, supposin’ I gets no more. You’ve giv’ me enough already, sir; thank you, sir. I’ll change it into ha’pence.’

“ ‘She does beat you sometimes, then?’

“ ‘Oh, my!’

“ ‘Here she rubbed her arms and elbows as if she ached all over at the thought, and these were the only parts she could reach to rub for the whole.

“ ‘I *will*,’ said Uncle Peter to himself.

“ ‘Do you think you were born on Christmas Day, little one?’

“ ‘I think I was once, sir.’

“ ‘I shall teach the child to tell lies if I go on asking her questions in this way,’ thought my uncle. ‘Will you go home with me?’ he said coaxingly.

“ ‘Yes, sir, if you will tell me where to put my broom, for I must not go home without it, else aunt would wollop me.’

“ ‘I will buy you a new broom.’

“ ‘But aunt would wollop me all the same if I did not bring home the old one for our Christmas fire.’

“ ‘Never mind. I will take care of you. You may bring your broom if you like, though,’ he added, seeing a cloud come over the little face.

“ ‘Thank you, sir,’ said the child; and, shouldering her broom, she trotted along behind him, as he led the way home.

“ But this would not do, either. Before they had gone twelve paces, he had the child in one hand; and before they had gone a second twelve, he had the broom in the other. And so Uncle Peter walked home with his child and his broom. The latter he set down inside the door, and the former he led upstairs to his room. There he seated her on a chair by the fire, and ringing the bell, asked the landlady to bring a basin of bread and milk. The woman cast a look of indignation and wrath at the poor little immortal. She might have been the impersonation of Christmas Day in the catacombs, as she sat with her feet wide apart, and reaching half-way down the legs of the chair, and her black eyes staring from the midst of knotted tangles of hair that never felt comb or brush, or were defended from the wind by bonnet or hood. I dare say uncle’s poor apartment, with its cases of stuffed birds and its square piano that was used for a cupboard, seemed to her the most sumptuous of conceivable abodes. But she said nothing—only stared. When her bread and milk came, she ate it up without a word, and when she had finished it, sat still for a moment, as if pondering what it became her

to do next. Then she rose, dropped a courtesy, and said :—
‘Thank you, sir. Please, sir, where’s my broom?’

“ ‘Oh, but I want you to stop with me, and be my little girl.’

“ ‘Please, sir, I would rather go to my crossing.’

“The face of Little Christmas lengthened visibly, and she was upon the point of crying. Uncle Peter saw that he had been too precipitate, and that he must woo the child before he could hope to win her; so he asked her for her address. But though she knew the way to her home perfectly, she could give only what seemed to him the most confused directions how to find it. No doubt to her they seemed as clear as day. Afraid of terrifying her by following her, the best way seemed to him to promise her a new frock on the morrow, if she would come and fetch it. Her face brightened so at the sound of a new frock, that my uncle had very little fear of the fault being hers if she did not come.

“ ‘Will you know the way back, my dear?’

“ ‘I always know my way anywheres,’ answered she. So she was allowed to depart with her cherished broom.

“Uncle Peter took my mother into council upon the affair of the frock. She thought an old one of my sister’s would do best. But my uncle had said a *new* frock, and a new one it must be. So next day my mother went with him to buy one, and was excessively amused with his entire ignorance of what was suitable for the child. However, the frock being purchased, he saw how absurd it would be to put a new frock over such garments as she must have below, and accordingly made my mother buy everything to clothe her completely. With these treasures he hastened home, and found poor Little Christmas and her broom waiting for him outside the door, for the landlady would not let her in. This roused the wrath of my uncle to such a degree, that, although he had borne

wrongs innumerable and aggravated for a long period of years without complaint, he walked in and gave her notice that he would leave in a week. I think she expected he would forget all about it before the day arrived; but with his further designs for Little Christmas, he was not likely to forget it; and I fear I have seldom enjoyed anything so much as the consternation of the woman (whom I heartily hated) when she saw a truck arrive to remove my uncle's few personal possessions from her inhospitable roof. I believe she took her revenge by giving her cronies to understand that she had turned my uncle away at a week's warning for bringing home improper companions to her respectable house.—But to return to Little Christmas. She fared all the better for the landlady's unkindness; for my mother took her home and washed her with her own soft hands from head to foot; and then put all the new clothes on her, and she looked charming. How my uncle would have managed I can't think. He was delighted at the improvement in her appearance. I saw him turn round and wipe his eyes with his handkerchief.

" 'Now, Little Christmas, will you come and live with me?' said he.

"She pulled the same face, though not quite so long as before, and said, 'I would rather go to my crossing, please, sir.'

"My uncle heaved a sigh and let her go.

"She shouldered her broom as if it had been the rifle of a giant, and trotted away to her work.

"But next day, and the next, and the next, she was not to be seen at her wonted corner. When a whole week had passed and she did not make her appearance, my uncle was in despair.

" 'You see, Charlie,' said he, 'I am fated to be of no use to anybody, though I was born on Christmas Day.'

"The very next day, however, being Sunday, my uncle found her as he went to church. She was sweeping a new crossing. She seemed to have found a lower deep still, for, alas ! all her new clothes were gone, and she was more tattered and wretched-looking than before. As soon as she saw my uncle she burst into tears.

" 'Look,' she said, pulling up her little frock, and showing her thigh with a terrible bruise upon it ; '*she* did it.'

"A fresh burst of tears followed.

" 'Where are your new clothes, Little Christmas ?' asked my uncle.

" 'She sold them for gin, and then beat me awful. Please, sir, I couldn't help it.'

"The child's tears were so bitter, that my uncle, without thinking, said—

" 'Never mind, dear ; you shall have another frock.'

"Her tears ceased, and her face brightened for a moment ; but the weeping returned almost instantaneously with increased violence, and she sobbed out :

" 'It's no use, sir ; she'd only serve me the same, sir.'

" 'Will you come home and live with me, then ?'

" 'Yes, please.'

"She flung her broom from her into the middle of the street, nearly throwing down a cab-horse, betwixt whose fore-legs it tried to pass ; then, heedless of the oaths of the man, whom my uncle pacified with a shilling, put her hand in that of her friend and trotted home with him. From that day till the day of his death she never left him—of her own accord, at least.

"My uncle had, by this time, got into lodgings with a woman of the right sort, who received the little stray lamb with open arms and open heart. Once more she was washed and clothed from head to foot, and from skin to frock. My uncle never allowed her to go out without him, or some one who was capable

of protecting her. He did not think it at all necessary to supply the woman, who might not be her aunt after all, with gin unlimited, for the privilege of rescuing Little Christmas from her cruelty. So he felt that she was in great danger of being carried off, for the sake either of her earnings or her ransom ; and, in fact, some very suspicious-looking characters were several times observed prowling about in the neighbourhood. Uncle Peter, however, took what care he could to prevent any report of this reaching the ears of Little Christmas, lest she should live in terror ; and contented himself with watching her carefully. It was some time before my mother would consent to our playing with her freely and beyond her sight ; for it was strange to hear the ugly words which would now and then break from her dear little innocent lips. But she was very easily cured of this, although, of course, some time must pass before she could be quite depended upon. She was a sweet-tempered, loving child. But the love seemed for some time to have no way of showing itself, so little had she been used to ways of love and tenderness. When we kissed her she never returned the kiss, but only stared ; yet whatever we asked her to do she would do as if her whole heart was in it ; and I did not doubt it was. Now I know it was.

“After a few years, when Christmas began to be considered tolerably capable of taking care of herself, the vigilance of my uncle gradually relaxed a little. A month before her thirteenth birthday, as near as my uncle could guess, the girl disappeared. She had gone to the day-school as usual, and was expected home in the afternoon ; for my uncle would never part with her to go to a boarding-school, and yet wished her to have the benefit of mingling with her fellows, and not being always tied to the button-hole of an old bachelor. But she did not return at the usual hour. My uncle went to inquire about her. She had left the school with the rest. Night drew on. My

uncle was in despair. He roamed the streets all night ; spoke about his child to every policeman he met ; went to the station-house of the district, and described her ; had bills printed, and offered a hundred pounds reward for her restoration. All was unavailing. The miscreants must have seen the bills, but feared to repose confidence in the offer. Poor Uncle Peter drooped and grew thin. Before the month was out, his clothes were hanging about him like a sack. He could hardly swallow a mouthful ; hardly even sit down to a meal. I believe he loved his Little Christmas every whit as much as if she had been his own daughter—perhaps more—for he could not help thinking of what she might have been if he had not rescued her ; and he felt that God had given her to him as certainly as if she had been his own child, only that she had come in another way. He would get out of bed in the middle of the night, unable to sleep, and go wandering up and down the streets, and into dreadful places, sometimes, to try to find her. But fasting and watching could not go on long without bringing friends with them. Uncle Peter was seized with a fever, which grew and grew till his life was despaired of. He was very delirious at times, and then the strangest fancies had possession of his brain. Sometimes he seemed to see the horrid woman she called her aunt, torturing the poor child ; sometimes it was old Pagan Father Christmas, clothed in snow and ice, come to fetch his daughter ; sometimes it was his old landlady shutting her out in the frost ; or himself finding her afterwards, but frozen so hard to the ground that he could not move her to get her indoors. The doctors seemed doubtful, and gave as their opinion—a decided shake of the head.

“Christmas Day arrived. In the afternoon, to the wonder of all about him, although he had been wandering a moment before, he suddenly said—

“ ‘I was born on Christmas Day, you know. This is the first Christmas Day that didn’t bring me good luck.’

“Turning to me, he added—

“ ‘Charlie, my boy, it’s a good thing ANOTHER besides me was born on Christmas Day, isn’t it?’

“ ‘Yes, dear uncle,’ said I ; and it was all I could say. He lay quite quiet for a few minutes, when there came a gentle knock to the street door.

“ ‘That’s Chrissy!’ he cried, starting up in bed, and stretching out his arms with trembling eagerness. ‘And me to say this Christmas Day would bring me no good!’

“He fell back on his pillow, and burst into a flood of tears.

“I rushed down to the door, and reached it before the servant. I stared. There stood a girl about the size of Chrissy, with an old battered bonnet on, and a ragged shawl. She was standing on the door-step, trembling. I felt she was trembling somehow, for I don’t think I saw it. She had Chrissy’s eyes too, I thought ; but the light was dim now, for the evening was coming on.

“All this passed through my mind in a moment, during which she stood silent.

“ ‘What is it?’ I said, in a tremor of expectation.

“ ‘Charlie, don’t you know me?’ she said, and burst into tears.

“We were in each other’s arms in a moment—for the first time. But Chrissy is my wife now. I led her upstairs in triumph, and into my uncle’s room.

“ ‘I knew it was my lamb!’ he cried, stretching out his arms, and trying to lift himself up, only he was too weak.

“Chrissy flew to his arms. She was very dirty, and her clothes had such a smell of poverty ! But there she lay in my uncle’s bosom, both of them sobbing, for a long time ; and when at last

she withdrew, she tumbled down on the floor, and there she lay motionless. I was in a dreadful fright, but my mother came in at the moment, while I was trying to put some brandy within her cold lips, and got her into a warm bath, and put her to bed.

“In the morning she was much better, though the doctor would not let her get up for a day or two. I think, however, that was partly for my uncle’s sake.

“When at length she entered the room one morning, dressed in her own nice clothes, for there were plenty in the wardrobe in her room, my uncle stretched out his arms to her once more, and said :

“ ‘ Ah ! Chrissy, I thought I was going to have my own way, and die on Christmas Day ; but it would have been one too soon, before I had found you, my darling.’

“ It was resolved that on that same evening, Chrissy should tell my uncle her story. We went out for a walk together ; and though she was not afraid to go, the least thing startled her. A voice behind her would make her turn pale and look hurriedly round. Then she would smile again, even before the colour had had time to come back to her cheeks, and say — ‘ What a goose I am ! But it is no wonder.’ I could see too that she looked down at her nice clothes now and then with satisfaction. She does not like me to say so, but she does not deny it either, for Chrissy can’t tell a story even about her own feelings. My uncle had given us five pounds each to spend, and that was jolly. We bought each other such a lot of things, besides some for other people. And then we came home and had dinner *tête-à-tête* in my uncle’s dining-room ; after which we went up to my uncle’s room, and sat over the fire in the twilight till his afternoon-nap was over, and he was ready for his tea. This was ready for him by the time he awoke. Chrissy got up on the bed beside him ; I got

up at the foot of the bed, facing her, and we had the tea-tray and plenty of *etceteras* between us.

“‘Oh! I *am* happy!’ said Chrissy, and began to cry.

“‘So am I, my darling!’ rejoined Uncle Peter, and followed her example.

“‘So am I,’ said I, ‘but I don’t mean to cry about it.’ And then I did.

“We all had one cup of tea, and some bread and butter in silence after this. But when Chrissy had poured out the second cup for Uncle Peter, she began of her own accord to tell us her story.

“‘It was very foggy when we came out of school that afternoon, as you may remember, dear uncle.’

“‘Indeed I do,’ answered Uncle Peter with a sigh.

“‘I was coming along the way home with Bessie—you know Bessie, uncle—and we stopped to look in at a book-seller’s window where the gas was lighted. It was full of Christmas things already. One of them I thought very pretty, and I was standing staring at it, when all at once I saw that a big drabby woman had poked herself in between Bessie and me. She was staring in at the window too. She was so nasty that I moved away a little from her, but I wanted to have one more look at the picture. The woman came close to me. I moved again. Again she pushed up to me. I looked in her face, for I was rather cross by this time. A horrid feeling, I cannot tell you what it was like, came over me as soon as I saw her. I know how it was now, but I did not know then why I was frightened. I think she saw I was frightened; for she instantly walked against me, and shoved and hustled me round the corner—it was a corner-shop—and before I knew, I was in another street. It was dark and narrow. Just at the moment a man came from the opposite side and joined the woman. Then they caught hold of my

hands, and before my fright would let me speak, I was deep into the narrow lane, for they ran with me as fast as they could. Then I began to scream, but they said such horrid words that I was forced to hold my tongue; and in a minute more they had me inside a dreadful house, where the plaster was dropping away from the walls, and the skeleton-ribs of the house were looking through. I was nearly dead with terror and disgust. I don't think it was a bit less dreadful to me from having dim recollections of having known such places well enough at one time of my life. I think that only made me the more frightened, because so the place seemed to have a claim upon me. What if I ought to be there after all, and these dreadful creatures were my father and mother!

"‘I thought they were going to beat me at once, when the woman, whom I suspected to be my aunt, began to take off my frock. I was dreadfully frightened, but I could not cry. However it was only my clothes that they wanted. But I cannot tell you how frightful it was. They took almost everything I had on, and it was only when I began to scream in despair—sit still, Charlie, it's all over now—that they stopped, with a nod to each other, as much as to say—‘we can get the rest afterwards.’ Then they put a filthy frock on me; brought me some dry bread to eat; locked the door, and left me. It was nearly dark now. There was no fire. And all my warm clothes were gone.—Do sit still, Charlie.—I was dreadfully cold. There was a wretched-looking bed in one corner, but I think I would have died of cold rather than get into it. And the air in the place was frightful. How long I sat there in the dark, I don't know.’

"‘What did you do all the time?’ said I.

"‘There was only one thing to be done, Charlie. I think that is a foolish question to ask.’

"‘Well, what *did* you do, Chrissy?’

“ ‘Said my prayers, Charlie.’

“ ‘And then?’

“ ‘Said them again.’

“ ‘And nothing else?’

“ ‘Yes; I tried to get out of the window, but that was of no use; for I could not open it. And it was one story high at least.’

“ ‘And what did you do next?’

“ ‘Said over all my hymns.’

“ ‘And then—what *did* you do next?’

“ ‘Why do you ask me so many times?’

“ ‘Because I want to know.’

“ ‘Well, I will tell you.—I left my prayers alone; and I began at the beginning, and I told God the whole story, as if He had known nothing about it, from the very beginning when Uncle Peter found me on the crossing, down to the minute when I was talking there to Him in the dark.’

“ ‘Ah! my dear,’ said my uncle, with faltering voice, ‘you felt better after that, I dare say. And here was I in despair about you, and thought He did not care for any of us. I was very naughty, indeed.’

“ ‘And what next?’ I said.

“ ‘By-and-by I heard a noise of quarrelling in the street, which came nearer and nearer. The door was burst open by some one falling against it. Blundering steps came up the stairs. The two who had robbed me, evidently tipsy, were trying to unlock the door. At length they succeeded, and tumbled into the room.’

“ ‘Where is the unnatural wretch,’ said the woman, ‘who ran away and left her own mother in poverty and sickness?’

“ ‘Oh! uncle, can it be that she is my mother?’ said Chrissy, interrupting herself.

“ ‘I don’t think she is,’ answered Uncle Peter. ‘She only

wanted to vex you, my lamb. But it doesn't matter whether she is or not.'

" 'Doesn't it, uncle?—I am ashamed of her.'

" 'But you are God's child. And He can't be ashamed of you. For He gave you the mother you had, whoever she was, and never asked you which you would have. So you need not mind. We ought always to like best to be just what God has made us.'

" 'I am sure of that, uncle.—Well, she began groping about to find me, for it was very dark. I sat quite still, except for trembling all over, till I felt her hands on me, when I jumped up, and she fell on the floor. She began swearing dreadfully, but did not try to get up. I crept away to another corner. I heard the man snoring, and the woman breathing loud. Then I felt my way to the door, but, to my horror, found the man lying across it on the floor, so that I could not open it. Then I believe I cried for the first time. I was nearly frozen to death, and there was all the long night to bear yet. How I got through it, I cannot tell. It did go away. Perhaps God destroyed some of it for me. But when the light began to come through the window, and show me all the filth of the place, the man and the woman lying on the floor, the woman with her head cut and covered with blood, I began to feel that the darkness had been my friend. I felt this yet more when I saw the state of my own dress, which I had forgotten in the dark. I felt as if I had done some shameful thing, and wanted to follow the darkness, and hide in the skirts of it. It was an old gown of some woollen stuff, but it was impossible to tell what, it was so dirty and worn. I was ashamed that even those drunken creatures should wake and see me in it. But the light would come, and it came and came, until at last it waked them up, and the first words were so dreadful! They quarrelled and swore at each other and at me, until I almost

thought there couldn't be a God who would let that go on so, and never stop it. But I suppose He wants them to stop, and doesn't care to stop it Himself, for He could easily do that of course, if He liked.'

"'Just right, my darling !' said Uncle Peter with emotion.

"Chrissy saw that my uncle was too much excited by her story although he tried *not* to show it, and with a wisdom which I have since learned to appreciate, cut it short.

"'They did not treat me cruelly, though ; the worst was, that they gave me next to nothing to eat. Perhaps they wanted to make me thin and wretched-looking, and I believe they succeeded.—Charlie, you'll turn over the cream, if you don't sit still.—Three days passed this way. I have thought all over it, and I think they were a little puzzled how to get rid of me. They had no doubt watched me for a long time, and now they had got my clothes, they were afraid.—At last one night they took me out. My aunt, if aunt she is, was respectably dressed—that is, comparatively, and the man had a great coat on, which covered his dirty clothes. They helped me into a cart which stood at the door, and drove off. I resolved to watch the way we went. But we took so many turnings through narrow streets before we came out in a main road, that I soon found it was all one mass of confusion in my head ; and it was too dark to read any of the names of the streets, for the man kept as much in the middle of the road as possible. We drove some miles, I should think, before we stopped at the gate of a small house with a big porch, which stood alone. My aunt got out and went up to the house, and was admitted. After a few minutes she returned, and making me get out, she led me up to the house, where an elderly lady stood, holding the door half open. When we reached it, my aunt gave me a sort of shove in, saying to the lady, 'There she is.' Then she said to me: 'Come

now, be a good girl and don't tell lies;' and turning hastily, ran down the steps, and got into the cart at the gate, which drove off at once the way we had come. The lady looked at me from head to foot sternly, but kindly, too, I thought, and so glad was I to find myself clear of those dreadful creatures, that I burst out crying. She instantly began to read me a lecture on the privilege of being placed with Christian people, who would instruct me how my soul might be saved, and teach me to lead an honest and virtuous life. I tried to say that I had led an honest life. But as often as I opened my mouth to tell anything about myself or my uncle, or, indeed, to say anything at all, I was stopped by her saying—'Now don't tell lies. Whatever you do, don't tell lies.' This shut me up quite. I could not speak when I knew she would not believe me. But I did not cry, I only felt my face get very hot, and somehow my back-bone grew longer, though I felt my eyes fixed on the ground.

"'But,' she went on, 'you must change your dress. I will show you the way to your room, and you will find a print gown there, which I hope you will keep clean. And above all things don't tell lies.'

"Here Chrissy burst out laughing, as if it was such fun to be accused of lying; but presently her eyes filled, and she made haste to go on.

"'You may be sure I made haste to put on the nice clean frock, and, to my delight, found other clean things for me as well. I declare I felt like a princess for a whole day after, notwithstanding the occupation. For I soon found that I had been made over to Mrs. Sprinx, as a servant of all work. I think she must have paid these people for the chance of reclaiming one whom they had represented as at least a great liar. Whether my wages were to be paid to them, or even what they were to be, I never heard. I made up my mind at

once that the best thing would be to do the work without grumbling, and do it as well as I could, for that would be doing no harm to any one, but the contrary, while it would give me the better chance of making my escape. But though I was determined to get away the first opportunity, and was miserable when I thought how anxious you would all be about me, yet I confess it was such a relief to be clean and in respectable company, that I caught myself singing once or twice the very first day. But the old lady soon stopped that. She was about in the kitchen the greater part of the day till almost dinner-time, and taught me how to cook and save my soul both at once.'

"'Indeed,' interrupted Uncle Peter, 'I have read receipts for the salvation of the soul that sounded very much as if they came out of a cookery-book.' And the wrinkles of his laugh went up into his night-cap. Neither Chrissy nor I understood this at the time, but I have often thought of it since.

"Chrissy went on :—

"'I had finished washing up my dinner-things, and sat down for a few minutes, for I was tired. I was staring into the fire, and thinking and thinking how I should get away, and what I should do when I got out of the house, and feeling as if the man and the woman were always prowling about it, and watching me through the window, when suddenly I saw a little boy in a corner of the kitchen, staring at me with great brown eyes. He was a little boy, perhaps about six years old, with a pale face, and very earnest look. I did not speak to him, but waited to see what he would do. A few minutes passed, and I forgot him. But as I was wiping my eyes, which would get wet sometimes, notwithstanding my good-fortune, he came up to me, and said in a timid whisper—

"'Are you a princess?'

"'What makes you think that?' I said.

“‘You have got such white hands,’ he answered.

“‘No, I am not a princess,’ I said.

“‘Aren’t you Cinderella?’

“‘No, my darling,’ I replied; ‘but something like her; for they have stolen me away from home, and brought me here. I wish I could get away.’

“‘And here I confess I burst into a downright fit of crying.

“‘Don’t cry,’ said the little fellow, stroking my cheek. ‘I will let you out some time. Shall you be able to find your way home all by yourself?’

“‘Yes, I think so,’ I answered; but at the same time I felt very doubtful about it, because I always fancied those people watching me. But before either of us spoke again, in came Mrs. Sprinx.

“‘You naughty boy! What business have you to make the servant neglect her work?’

“‘For I was still sitting by the fire, and my arm was round the dear little fellow, and his head was leaning on my shoulder.

“‘She’s not a servant, auntie!’ cried he, indignantly. She’s a real princess, though of course she won’t own to it.’

“‘What lies you have been telling the boy! You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Come along directly. Get the tea at once, Jane.’

“‘My little friend went with his aunt, and I rose and got the tea. But I felt much lighter-hearted since I had the sympathy of the little boy to comfort me. Only I was afraid they would make him hate me. But, although I saw very little of him the rest of the time, I knew they had not succeeded in doing so; for as often as he could, he would come sliding up to me, saying, ‘How do you do, princess?’ and then run away, afraid of being seen and scolded.

“‘I was getting very desperate about making my escape, for

there was a high wall about the place, and the gate was always locked at night. When Christmas Eve came, I was nearly crazy with thinking that to-morrow was uncle's birthday; and that I should not be with him. But that very night, after I had gone to my room, the door opened, and in came little Eddie in his night-gown, his eyes looking very bright and black over it.

“‘There, princess!’ said he, ‘there is the key of the gate. Run.’

“‘I took him in my arms and kissed him, unable to speak. He struggled to get free, and ran to the door. There he turned and said—

“‘You will come back and see me some day—will you not?’

“‘That I will,’ I answered.

“‘That you shall,’ said Uncle Peter.

“‘I hid the key, and went to bed, where I lay trembling. As soon as I was sure they must be asleep, I rose and dressed. I had no bonnet or shawl but those I had come in; and though they disgusted me, I thought it better to put them on. But I dared not unlock the street-door for fear of making a noise. So I crept out of the kitchen-window, and then I got out at the gate all safe. No one was in sight. So I locked it again, and threw the key over. But what a time of fear and wandering about I had in the darkness, before I dared to ask any one the way. It was a bright, clear night; and I walked very quietly till I came upon a great wide common. The sky, and the stars, and the wideness frightened me, and made me gasp at first. I felt as if I should fall away from everything into nothing. And it was so lonely! But then I thought of God, and in a moment I knew that what I had thought loneliness was really the presence of God. And then I grew brave again, and walked on. When the morning dawned, I met a brick-

layer going to his work ; and found that I had been wandering away from London all the time ; but I did not mind that. Now I turned my face towards it, though not the way I had come. But I soon got dreadfully tired and faint, and once I think I fainted quite. I went up to a house, and asked for a piece of bread, and they gave it to me, and I felt much better after eating it. But I had to rest so often, and got so tired, and my feet got so sore, that—you know how late it was before I got home to my darling uncle.'

" 'And me too !' I expostulated.

" 'And you, too, Charlie,' she answered ; and we all cried over again.

" 'This shan't happen any more !' said my uncle.

"After tea was over, he asked for writing-things, and wrote a note, which he sent off.

"The next morning, about eleven, as I was looking out of the window, I saw a carriage drive up and stop at our door.

" 'What a pretty little brougham !' I cried. 'And such a jolly horse ! Look here, Chrissy !'

"Presently Uncle Peter's bell rang, and Miss Chrissy was sent for. She came down again radiant with pleasure.

" 'What do you think, Charlie ! That carriage is mine—all my own. And I am to go to school in it always. Do come and have a ride in it.'

"You may be sure I was delighted to do so.

" 'Where shall we go ?' I said.

" 'Let us ask uncle if we may go and see the little darling who set me free.'

"His consent was soon obtained, and away we went. It was a long drive, but we enjoyed it beyond everything. When we reached the house, we were shown into the drawing-room. There was Mrs. Sprinx and little Eddie. The lady stared ; but the child knew Cinderella at once, and flew into her arms.

“‘I knew you were a princess!’ he cried. ‘There, auntie!’

“But Mrs. Sprinx had put on an injured look, and her hands shook very much.

“‘Really, Miss Belper, if that is your name, you have behaved in a most unaccountable way. Why did you not tell me, instead of stealing the key of the gate, and breaking the kitchen-window? A most improper way for a young lady to behave—to run out of the house at midnight!’

“‘You forget, madam,’ replied Chrissy, with more dignity than I had ever seen her assume, ‘that as soon as ever I attempted to open my mouth, you told me not to tell lies. You believed the wicked people who brought me here rather than myself. However, as you will not be friendly, I think we had better go. Come, Charlie!’

“‘Don’t go, princess,’ pleaded little Eddie.

“‘But I must, for your auntie does not like me,’ said Chrissy.

“‘I am sure I always meant to do my duty by you. And I will do so still.—Beware, my dear young woman, of the deceitfulness of riches. Your carriage won’t save your soul!’

“Chrissy was on the point of saying something rude, as she confessed when we got out; but she did not. She made her bow, turned and walked away. I followed, and poor Eddie would have done so too, but was laid hold of by his aunt. I confess this was not quite proper behaviour on Chrissy’s part; but I never discovered that till she made me see it. She was very sorry afterwards, and my uncle feared the brougham had begun to hurt her already, as she told me. For she had narrated the whole story to him, and his look first let her see that she had been wrong. My uncle went with her afterwards to see Mrs. Sprinx, and thank her for having done her best; and to take Eddie such presents as my uncle only knew how to buy for children. When he went to school, I know he sent

him a gold watch. From that time till now that she is my wife, Chrissy has had no more such adventures ; and if Uncle Peter did not die on Christmas Day, it did not matter much, for Christmas Day makes all the days of the year as sacred as itself."

CHAPTER XV.

HOW THE CHILDREN TOOK MY STORY.

WHEN Harry had finished reading, the colonel gallantly declared that the story was the best they had had. Mrs. Armstrong received this as a joke, and begged him not to be so unsparing.

"Ah! Mrs. Armstrong," returned he laughing, "you are not old enough yet, to know the truth from a joke. Don't you agree with me about the story, Mrs. Cathcart?"

"I think it is very pretty and romantic. Such men as Uncle Peter are not very common in the world. The story is not too true to Nature."

This she said in a tone intended to indicate superior acquaintance with the world and its nature. I fear Mrs. Cathcart and some others whom I could name, mean by *Nature* something very bad indeed, which yet an artist is bound to be loyal to. The colonel however seemed to be of a different opinion.

"If there never was such a man as Uncle Peter," said he, "there ought to have been; and it is all the more reason for putting him into a story that he is not to be found in the world."

"Bravo!" cried I. "You have answered a great question in a few words."

"I don't know," rejoined our host. "Have I? It seems to me as plain as the catechism."

I thought he might have found a more apt simile, but I held my peace.

Next morning, I walked out in the snow. Since the storm of that terrible night, it had fallen again quietly and plentifully; and now in the sunlight, the world—houses and trees, ponds and rivers—was like a creation, more than blocked out, but far from finished—in marble.

“And this,” I said to myself, as I regarded the wondrous loveliness with which the snow had at once clothed and disfigured the bare branches of the trees, “this is what has come of the chaos of falling flakes! To this repose of beauty has that storm settled and sunk! Will it not be so with our mental storms as well?”

But here the figure displeased me; for those were not the true right shapes of the things; and the truth does not stick to things, but shows itself out of them.

“This lovely show,” I said, “is the result of a busy fancy. This white world is the creation of a poet such as Shelley, in whom the fancy was too much for the intellect. Fancy settles upon anything; half destroys its form, half beautifies it with something that is not its own. But the true creative imagination, the form-seer, and the form-bestower, falls like the rain in the spring night, vanishing amid the roots of the trees; not settling upon them in clouds of wintry white, but breaking forth from them in clouds of summer green.”

And then my thoughts very naturally went from Nature to my niece; and I asked myself whether within the last few days I had not seen upon her countenance the expression of a mental spring-time. For the mind has its seasons four, with many changes, as well as the world, only that the cycles are generally longer: they can hardly be more mingled than as here in our climate.

Let me confess, now that the subject of the confession no

longer exists, that there had been something about Adela that, pet-child of mine as she was, had troubled me. In all her behaviour, so far as I had had any opportunity of judging, she had been as good as my desires at least. But there was a want in her face, a certain flatness of expression which I did not like. I love the common with all my heart, but I hate the common-place; and, foolish old bachelor that I am, the common-place in a woman troubles me, annoys me, makes me miserable. Well, it was something of the common-place in Adela's expression that had troubled me. Her eyes were clear, with lovely long dark lashes, but somehow the light in them had been always the same; and occasionally when I talked to her of the things I most wished her to care about, there was such an immobile condition of the features, associated with such a ready assent in words, that I felt her notion of what I meant must be something very different indeed from what I did mean. Her face looked as if it were made of something too thick for the inward light to shine through—wax, and not living muscle and skin. The fact was, the light within had not been kindled, else that face of hers would have been ready enough to let it shine out. Hitherto she had not seemed to me to belong at all to that company that praises God with sweet looks, as Thomas Hood describes Ruth as doing. What was wanting I had found it difficult to define. Her soul was asleep. She was dreaming a child's dreams, instead of seeing a woman's realities—realities that awake the swift play of feature, as the wind of God arouses the expression of a still landscape. So there seemed after all a gulf between her and me. She did not see what I saw, feel what I felt, seek what I sought. Occasionally even, the delicate young girl, pure and bright as the snow that hung on the boughs around me, would shock the wizened old bachelor with her worldliness—a worldliness that lay only in the use of current

worldly phrases of selfish contentment, or selfish care. Ah! how little do young beauties understand of the pitiful emotions which they sometimes rouse in the breasts of men whom they suppose to be absorbed in admiration of them! But for faith that these girls are God's work and only half made yet, one would turn from them with sadness, almost painful dislike, and take refuge with some noble-faced grandmother, or withered old maid, whose features tell of sorrow and patience. And the beauty would think with herself that such a middle-aged gentleman did not admire pretty girls, and was severe and unkind and puritanical; whereas it was the lack of beauty that made him turn away; the disappointment of a face—dull, that ought to be radiant; or the presence of only that sort of beauty, which in middle age, except the deeper nature should meantime come into play, would be worse than common-place—would be mingled with the trail of more or less guilty sensuality. Many a woman at forty is repulsive, whom common men found at twenty irresistibly attractive; and many a woman at seventy is lovely to the eyes of the man who would have been compelled to allow that she was decidedly plain at seventeen.

“Maidens' bairns are aye weel guided,” says the Scotch proverb; and the same may be said of bachelors' wives. So I will cease the strain, and return to Adela, the change in whom first roused it.

Of late, I had seen a glimmer of something in her countenance which I had never seen before—a something which, the first time I perceived it, made me say to her, in my own hearing only: “Ah, my dear, we shall understand each other by-and-by!” And now and then the light in her eye would be dimmed as by the foreshadowing of a tear, when there was no immediate and visible cause to account for it; and—which was very strange—I could not help fancying she began to be a

little shy of her old uncle.—Could it be that she was afraid of his insight reaching to her heart, and reading there more than she was yet willing to confess to herself?—But whatever the cause of the change might be, there was certainly a responsiveness in her, a readiness to meet every utterance, and take it home, by which the vanity of the old bachelor would have been flattered to the full, had not his heart come first, and forestalled the delight.

So absorbed was I in considering these things, that the time passed like one of my thoughts; and before I knew I found myself on the verge of the perilous moor over which Harry had ridden in the teeth and heart of the storm. How smooth yet cruel it looked in its thick covering of snow! There was heather beneath, within which lay millions of purple bells, ready to rush out at the call of summer, and ring peals of merry gladness, making the desolate place not only blossom but rejoice as the rose. And there were cold wells of brown water beneath that snow, of depth unknown, which nourished nothing but the green grass that hid the cold glare of their presence from the eyes of the else warefully affrighted traveller. And I thought of Adela when I thought of the heather; and of some other women whom I had known, when I thought of the wells.

When I came home, I told Adela where I had been, and what a desolate place it was. And the flush that rose on her pale cheek was just like the light of the sunset which I had left shining over the whiteness of that snowy region. And I said to myself: "*It is so.* And I trust it may be well."

As I walked home, I had bethought myself of a story which I had brought down with me in the hope of a chance of reading it, but which Adela's illness had put out of my mind; for it was only a child's story; and although I hoped older people might find something in it, it would have been absurd to read it

without the presence of little children. So I said to Adela :

“Don’t you know any little children in Purleybridge, Adela ?”

“Oh ! yes ; plenty.”

“Couldn’t you ask some of them one night, and I would tell them a story. I think at this season they should have a share in what is going, and I have got one I think they would like.”

“I shall be delighted. I will speak to papa about it at once. But next time—”

“Yes, I know. Next time Harry Armstrong was going to read ; but to tell you the truth, Adela, I doubt if he will be ready. I know he is dreadfully busy just now, and I believe he will be thankful to have a reprieve for a day or two, and his story, which I expect will be a good one, will be all the better for it.”

“Then I will speak to papa about it the moment he comes in ; and you will tell Mr. Henry. And mind, uncle, you take the change upon your own shoulders.”

“Trust me, my dear,” I said, as I left the room.

As I had anticipated, Harry was grateful. Everything was arranged.

So the next evening but one, we had a merry pretty company of boys and girls, none older, or at least looking older, than twelve. It did my heart good to see how Adela made herself at home with them, and talked to them as if she were one of themselves. By the time tea was over, I had made friends with them all, which was a stroke in its way nearly equal to Chaucer’s, who made friends with all the nine-and-twenty Canterbury pilgrims before the sun was down. And the way I did was this. I began with the one next me, asking her the question :

“Do you like fairy-stories ?”

"Yes, I do," answered she, heartily.

"Did you ever hear of the princess with the blue foot?"

"No. Will you tell me, please?"

Then I turned to the one on my other side, and asked her:

"Did you ever hear of the giant that was all skin—not skin and bone, you know, but all skin?"

No-o," she answered, and her round blue eyes got rounder and bluer.

The next was a boy. I asked him:

"Did you ever hear of Don Worm of Wakemup?"

"No. Do please tell us about it."

And so I asked them, round the room. And by that time all eyes were fixed upon me. Then I said:

"You see I cannot tell you all these stories to-night. But would you all like one of some sort?"

A chorus of *I should* filled the room.

"What shall it be about, then?"

"A wicked fairy."

"No; that's stupid. I'm tired of wicked fairies," said a scornful little girl.

"A good giant, then," said a priggish imp, with a face as round as the late plum-pudding.

"I am afraid I could not tell you a story about a *good* giant; for unfortunately all the good giants I ever heard of were very stupid; so stupid that a story would not make itself about them; so stupid, indeed, that they were always made game of by creatures not half so big or half so good; and I don't like such stories. Shall I tell you about the wicked giant that grew little children in his garden instead of radishes, and then carried them about in his waistcoat pocket, and ate one as often as he remembered he had got some?"

"Yes, yes; please do."

"He used to catch little children and plant them in his garden, where you might see them in rows, with their heads only above ground, rolling their eyes about, and growing awfully fast. He liked greedy boys best—boys that ate plum-pudding till they felt as if their belts were too tight."

Here the fat-faced boy stuck both his hands inside his belt.

"Because he was so fond of radishes," I said—and so told them the tale of *The Giant's Heart*.

I read so far in peace, but there came a break.

"Now, you know that's all nonsense; for little children don't grow in gardens. *You* may believe in the radish-beds. *I* don't," said one pert little puss.

"I never said I did," replied I. "If the giant did, that's enough for my story. I told you the good giants are very stupid; so you may think what the bad ones are. Indeed, the giant never really tried the plan. No doubt he did plant the children, but he always pulled them up and ate them before they had a chance of increasing."

And with that I went on again.

"What funny things you do make up!" said a boy. "How could the giant's heart be in an eagle's nest, and the giant himself alive and well without it?"

"Whatever you may think of it, Master Fred, I assure you I did not make that up. If it ever was made up, no one can tell who did it; for it was written in the chronicles of Giantland long before one of us was born. It was quite common," said I, in an injured tone, "for a giant to put his heart out to nurse, because he did not like the trouble and responsibility of doing it himself. It was, I confess, a dangerous sort of thing to do.—But do you want any more of my story or not?"

"Oh! yes, please," cried Frederick, very heartily.

"Then don't you find any more fault with it, or I will stop."

Master Fred was straightway silent, and I went on once more.

* * * * *

"Silly thing!" said a little wisehead, when she heard at the close that the little girl of the tale was sorry for the wicked giant.

"What a horrid story!" said another, who sat staring with great eyes into the fire.

"I don't think it at all a nice story for supper, with those horrid spiders, too," said an older girl.

"Well, let us have a game and forget it," I said.

"No; that we shan't, I am sure," said one.

"I will tell our Amy. Won't it be fun?"

"She'll scream," said another.

"I'll tell her all the more."

"No, no; you mustn't be unkind," said I; "else you will never help little children against wicked giants. The giants will eat you too, then."

"Oh! I know what you mean. You can't frighten me."

This was said by one of the elder girls, who promised fair to reach before long the summit of uncompromising womanhood. She made me feel very small with my moralizing; so I dropt it. On the whole I was rather disappointed with the effect of my story. Perhaps the disappointment was no more than I deserved; but I did not like to think I had failed with children.

Nor did I think so any longer after a darling little blue-eyed girl, who had sat next me at tea, came to me to say good-night, and, reaching up, put her arms round my neck and kissed me, and then whispered very gently:

"Thank you, dear Mr. Smith. I will be good. It was a

very nice story. If I was a man, I would kill all the wicked people in the world. But I am only a little girl, you know ; so I can only be good."

The darling did not know how much more one good woman can do to kill evil than all the swords of the world in the hands of righteous heroes.

The curate had come in while I was telling my story, and now he spoke for the first time.

"I have enjoyed what I heard of your story much, Mr. Smith," he said, "—so much that I should like to tell the children one myself."

"Do, do, please," it seemed as if all the children cried together.

So Mr. Armstrong sat down, took one of the smallest on his knees, and told them the following story about a lost lamb.

"THE LOST LAMB.

"In some parts of Scotland there are a great many high hills or mountains, crowded together, only divided from each other by deep valleys. They all grow out of one root—that is, the earth. The tops of these hills are high up and lonely, with the stars above them ; and the wind roaring and raving among them makes such a noise against the hard rocks, running into the holes in them and out again, that their steep sides are sometimes very awful places. But in the sunshine, although they do look lonely, they are so bright and beautiful, that all the boys and girls fancy the way to heaven lies up those hills.

"And doesn't it?"

"No."

"Where is it, then?"

"Ah ! that's just what you come to this world to find out. But you must let me go on with my story now.

“ In the winter, on the other hand, they are such wild, howling places, with the hard hailstones beating upon them, and the soft, smothering snow-flakes heaping up dreadful wastes of whiteness upon them, that if ever there was a child out on them he would die with fear, if he did not die with cold. But there are only sheep there, and as soon as the winter comes over the tops of the hills the sheep come down their sides, because it is warmer the lower down you come ; even a foot thick of wool on their backs and sides could not keep out the terrible cold up there.

“ But the sheep are not very knowing creatures, so they are something better instead. They are wise—that is, they are obedient—creatures, obedience often being the very best wisdom. Because they are not very knowing, they have a man to take care of them, who knows where to take them, especially when a storm comes on. Not that the sheep are so very silly as not to know where to go to get out of the wind, but they don’t and can’t think that some ways of getting out of danger are more dangerous still. They would lie down in a quiet place, and stay there till the snow settled down over them and smothered them. Or they would tumble down steep places and be killed, or carried away by the stream at the bottom. So, though they know a little, they don’t know enough, and therefore need a shepherd to take care of them.

“ Now the shepherd, though he is wise, is not quite clever enough for all that is wanted of him up in those strange, terrible hills, and he needs his dog to help him.

“ Well, the shepherd tells the dog what he wants done, and off the dog runs to do it ; for he can run three times as fast as the shepherd, and can get up and down places much better. I am not sure that he can see better than the shepherd, but I know he can smell better. So that he is just four legs and a long nose to the shepherd, besides the love he gives him,

which would comfort any good man, even if it were offered him by a hedge-hog or a hen.

“One evening, in the beginning of April, the weakly sun of the season had gone down with a pale face behind the shoulder of a hill in the background of my story. And because he was gone down, the peat-fires upon the hearths of the cottages all began to glow more brightly, as if they were glad he was gone at last, and had left them their work to do,—or, rather, as if they wanted to do all they could to make up for his absence. On one hearth in particular the peat-fire glowed very brightly. There was a pot hanging over it, with supper in it; and there was a little girl sitting by it, with a sweet, thoughtful face. Her hair was done up in a silken net, for it was the custom with Scotch girls to have their hair so arranged, many years before it became a fashion in other lands. She was busy with a blue ribbed stocking, which she was knitting for her father.

“He was out on the hills. He had that morning taken his sheep higher up than before, and Ellen knew this; but it could not be long now before she would hear his footsteps, and measure the long stride between which brought him and happiness home together.”

“But hadn’t she any mother?”

“Oh! yes, she had. If you had been in the cottage that night you would have heard a cough every now and then, and would have found that Ellen’s mother was lying in a bed in the room—not a bed with curtains, but a bed with doors like a press. This does not seem a nice way of having a bed; but we should all be glad of the wooden curtains about us at night, if we lived in such a cottage, on the side of a hill along which the wind swept like a wild river, only ten times faster than any river would run, even down a hill-side. Through the cottage it would be spouting, and streaming, and eddying, and fighting, all night long; and a poor woman with a cough, or a man who

has been out in the cold all day, is very glad to lie in a sheltered place and leave the rest of the house to the wind and the fairies.

“Ellen’s mother was ill, and there was little hope of her getting well again. What she could have done without Ellen I can’t think. It was so much easier to be ill with Ellen sitting there. For she was a good girl.

“After a while, Ellen rose and put some peats on the fire, and hung the pot a link or two higher on the chain; for she was a wise creature, though she was only twelve, and could cook very well. Then she sat down to her knitting again, which was a very frugal amusement.

“‘I wonder what’s keeping your father, Ellen,’ said her mother from the bed.

“‘I don’t know, mother. It’s not very late yet. He’ll be home by-and-by. You know he was going over the shoulder of the hill to-day.’

“Ellen knew that he ought, by rights, to have been home at least half an hour ago. But at length she heard the distant sound of a heavy shoe upon the point of a great rock that grew up from the depths of the earth and just came through the surface in the path leading across the furze and brake to their cottage. She always watched for that sound—the sound of her father’s shoe, studded thick with broad-headed nails, upon the top of that rock. She started up; but instead of rushing out to meet him, went to the fire and lowered the pot. Then, taking up a wooden bowl, half-full of oatmeal neatly pressed down into it, with a little salt on the top, she proceeded to make a certain dish for her father’s supper, of which strong Scotchmen are very fond. By the time her father reached the door it was ready, and set down with a plate over it to keep it hot, though it had a great deal more need, I think, to be let cool a little.

“When he entered, he looked troubled. He was a tall man, dressed in rough grey cloth, with a broad, round, blue bonnet, as he called his head-gear.

“His face was weather-beaten and quiet, with large, grand features, in which the docility of his dogs and the gentleness of his sheep were mingled with the strength and wisdom of a man.

“‘Well, Ellen,’ he said, laying his hand on her forehead as she looked up into his face, ‘how’s your mother?’

“And, without waiting for an answer, he went to the bed, where the pale face of his wife lay upon the pillow. She held out her thin, white hand to him, and he took it so gently in his strong, brown hand! But, before he had spoken, she saw the trouble on his face, and said :

“‘What has made you so late to-night, John?’

“‘I was nearly at the fold,’ said the shepherd, ‘before I saw that one of the lambs was missing. So, after I got them all in, I went back with the dogs to look for him.’

“‘Where’s Jumper, then?’ asked Ellen, who had been patting the neck and stroking the ears of the one dog which had followed at the shepherd’s heels, and was now lying before the fire, enjoying the warmth none the less that he had braved the cold all day without minding it a bit.

“‘When we couldn’t see anything of the lamb,’ replied her father, ‘I told Jumper to go after him and bring him to the house; and Blackfoot and I came home together. I doubt he’ll have a job of it, poor dog! for it’s going to be a rough night; but if dog can bring him, he will.’

“As the shepherd stopped speaking, he seated himself by the fire and drew the wooden bowl toward him. Then he lifted his blue bonnet, or Scotch cap, from his head, and said grace, half-aloud, half-murmured to himself. Then he put his bonnet on again, for his head was rather bald, and, as I told you, the cottage was a draughty place. And just as he put it on,

a blast of wind struck the cottage and roared in the wide chimney. The next moment the rain dashed against the little window of four panes, and fell hissing into the peat-fire.

“‘There it comes,’ said the shepherd.

“‘Poor Jumper!’ said Ellen.

“‘And poor little lamb!’ said the shepherd.

“‘It’s the lamb’s own fault,’ said Ellen; ‘he shouldn’t have run away.’

“‘Ah! yes,’ returned her father; ‘but then the lamb didn’t know what he was about, exactly.’

“When the shepherd had finished his supper, he rose and went out to see whether Jumper and the lamb were coming; but the dark night would have made the blackest dog and the whitest lamb both of one colour, and he soon came in again. Then he took the Bible and read a chapter to his wife and daughter, which did them all good, even though Ellen did not understand very much of it. And then he prayed a prayer, and was very near praying for Jumper and the lamb, only he could not quite. And there he was wrong. He should have prayed about whatever troubled him, or could be done good to. But he was such a good man, that I am almost ashamed of saying he was wrong.

“And just as he came to the ‘Amen’ in his prayer, there came a whine at the door. And he rose from his knees and went and opened the door. And there was the lamb, with Jumper behind him. And Jumper looked dreadfully wet, and draggled, and tired, and the curls had all come out of his long hair. And yet he seemed as happy as dog could be, and looked up in the face of the shepherd triumphantly, as much as to say, ‘Here he is, master!’ And the lamb looked scarcely anything the worse; for his thick, oily wool had kept away the wet; and he hadn’t been running about everywhere looking for Jumper, as Jumper had been for him.

“And Jumper, after Ellen had given him his supper, lay down by the fire beside the other dog, which made room for him to go next the glowing peats; and the lamb, which had been eating all day and didn’t want any supper, lay down beside them. And then Ellen bade her father and mother and the dogs good-night, and went away to bed likewise, thinking the wind might blow as it pleased now, for sheep and dogs, and father and all, were safe for the whole of the dark, windy hours between that and the morning. It is so nice to know that there is a long *nothing to do!*—but only after everything is done.

“Ellen lay down in her warm bed, feeling as safe and snug as ever child felt in a large, rich house in a great city. For there was the wind howling outside to make it all the quieter inside; and there was the great, bare, cold hill before the window, which, although she could not see it, and only knew that it was there, made the bed in which she lay feel soft, and woolly, and warm. Now, this bed was separated from her father and mother’s by a thin partition only, and she heard them talking.

“‘It wasn’t the loss of the lamb, John, that made you look so troubled when you came home to-night,’ said her mother.

“‘No, it wasn’t, Jane, I must confess,’ returned her father.

“‘You’ve heard something about Willie?’

“‘I can’t deny it.’

“‘What is it?’

“‘I’ll tell you in the morning.’

“‘I shan’t sleep a wink for thinking whatever it can be, John. You would better tell me now. If the Lord would only bring that stray lamb back to his fold, I should die happy,—sorry as I should be to leave Ellen and you, my own John.’

“‘Don’t talk about dying, Jane; it breaks my heart.’

“‘We won’t talk about it, then. But what’s this about Willie? And how came you to hear it?’

“‘I was close to the hill-road, when I saw James Jamieson, the carrier, coming up the hill with his cart. I ran and met him.’

“‘And he told you? What did he tell you?’

“‘Nothing very particular. He only hinted that he had heard, from Wauchope, the merchant, that a certain honest man’s son—he meant me, Jane—was going the wrong road. And I said to James Jamieson, “What road could the man mean?” And James said to me, “He meant the broad road, of course.” And I sat down on a stone, and I heard no more; at least, I could not make sense of what James went on to say; and when I lifted my head, James and his cart were just out of sight over the top of the hill. I dare say that was how I lost the lamb.’

“A deep silence followed, and Ellen understood that her mother could not speak. At length, a sob and a low weeping came through the boards to her keen mountain ear. But not another word was spoken; and, although Ellen’s heart was sad, she soon fell fast asleep.

“Now, Willie had gone to college, and had been a very good boy for the first winter. They go to college only in winter in Scotland. And he had come home in the end of March, and had helped his father to work their little farm, doing his duty well to the sheep, and to everything and everybody; for learning had not made him the least unfit for work. Indeed, work that learning does really make a man unfit for, cannot be fit work for that man—perhaps is not fit work for anybody. When winter came, he had gone back to Edinburgh, and he ought to have been home a week ago, and he had not come. He had written to say that he had to finish some lessons he had begun to give, and could not be home till the end of the

month. Now, this was so far true that it was not a lie. But there was more in it; he did not want to go home to the lonely hill-side,—so lonely, that there were only a father and a mother and a sister there. He had made acquaintance with some students who were fonder of drinking whisky than of getting up in the morning to study, and he didn't want to leave them.

"Ellen was, as I have said, too young to be kept awake by brooding over troubles, and so, before half an hour was over, was fast asleep and dreaming. And the wind outside, tearing at the thatch of the cottage, mingled with her dream.

"I will tell you what her dream was. She thought they were out in the dark and the storm,—she and her father. But she was no longer Ellen; she was Jumper. And her father said to her, 'Jumper, go after the black lamb and bring him home.' And away she galloped over the stones, and through the furze, and across the streams, and up the rocks, and jumped the stone fences, and swam the pools of water, to find the little black lamb. And all the time, somehow or other, the little black lamb was her brother Willie. And nothing could turn the dog Jumper, though the wind blew as if it would blow him off all his four legs, and off the hill, as one blows a fly off a book. And the hail beat in Jumper's face, as if it would put out his eyes or knock holes in his forehead, and yet Jumper went on.

"But it wasn't Jumper; it was Ellen, you know.

"Well, Jumper went on and on, and over the top of the cold, wet hill, and was beginning to grow hopeless about finding the black lamb, when, just a little way down the other side, he came upon him behind a rock. He was standing in a miry pool, all wet with the rain. Jumper would never have found him, the night was so dark and the lamb was so black, but that he gave a bleat; whereupon Jumper tried to say Willie,

but could not, and only gave a gobbling kind of bark. So he jumped upon the lamb, and taking a good hold of his wool, gave him a shake that made him pull his feet out of the mire, and then drove him off before him, trotting all the way home. When they came into the cottage, the black lamb ran up to Ellen's mother, and jumped into her bed, and Jumper jumped in after him ; and then Ellen was Ellen and Willie was Willie, as they used to be, when Ellen would creep into Willie's bed in the morning and kiss him awake. Then Ellen woke, and was sorry that it was a dream. For Willie was still away, far off on the broad road, and however was he to be got home? Poor black lamb !

"She soon made up her mind. Only how to carry out her mind was the difficulty. All day long she thought about it. And she wrote a letter to her father, telling him what she was going to do ; and when she went to her room the next night, she laid the letter on her bed, and, putting on her Sunday bonnet and cloak, waited till her parents should be asleep.

"The shepherd had gone to bed very sad. He, too, had been writing a letter. It had taken him all the evening to write, and Ellen had watched his face while he wrote it, and seen how the muscles of it worked with sorrow and pain as he slowly put word after word down on the paper. When he had finished it, and folded it up, and put a wafer on it, and addressed it, he left it on the table, and, as I said, went to bed, where he soon fell asleep ; for even sorrow does not often keep people awake who have worked hard through the day in the open air. And Ellen was watching.

"When she thought he was asleep, she took a pair of stockings out of a chest and put them in her pocket. Then, taking her Sunday shoes in her hand, she stepped gently from her room to the cottage door, which she opened easily, for it was never locked. She then found that the night was pitch dark ;

but she could keep the path well enough, for her bare feet told her at once when she was going off it.

“So, dark as it was, she soon reached the road. There was no wind that night, and the clouds hid the stars. She would turn in the direction of Edinburgh, and let the carrier overtake her. For she felt rather guilty, and was anxious to get on.

“After she had walked a good while, she began to wonder that the carrier had not come up with her. The fact was that the carrier never left till the early morning. She was not a bit afraid, though, reasoning that, as she was walking in the same direction, it would take him so much the longer to get up with her.

“At length, after walking a long way,—longer far than she thought, for she walked a great part of it half-asleep—she began to feel a little tired, and sat down upon a stone by the road-side. There was a stone behind her, too. She could just see its grey face. She leaned her back against it, and fell fast asleep.

“When she awoke she could not think where she was, or how she had got there: It was a dark, drizzly morning, and her feet were cold. But she was quite dry. For the rock against which she fell asleep in the night projected so far over her head that it had kept all the rain off her. She could not have chosen a better place, if she had been able to choose. But the sight around her was very dreary. In front lay a swampy ground, creeping away, dismal and wretched, to the horizon, where a long, low hill closed it. Behind her rose a mountain, bare and rocky, on which neither sheep nor shepherd was to be seen. Her home seemed to have vanished in the night, and left her either in a dream or in another world. And as she came to herself, the fear grew upon her that either she had missed the way in the dark or the carrier had gone past while she slept,—either of which was dreadful to contemplate.

She began to feel hungry, too, and she had not had the foresight to bring even a piece of oat-cake with her.

"It was only dusky dawn yet. There was plenty of time. She would sit down again for a little while ; for the rock had a homely look to her. It had been her refuge all night, and she was not willing to leave it. So she leaned her arms on her knees, and gazed out upon the dreary, grey, misty flat before her.

"Then she rose, and, turning her back on the waste, kneeled down, and prayed God that, as he taught Jumper to find lambs, he would teach her to find her brother. And thus she fell fast asleep again.

"When she awoke once more and turned toward the road, whom should she see standing there but the carrier, staring at her. And his big, strong horses stood in the road too, with their carts behind them. They were not in the least surprised. She could not help crying, just a little, for joy.

"'Why, Ellen, what on earth are you doing here?' said the carrier.

"'Waiting for you,' answered Ellen.

"'Where are you going, child?'

"'To Edinburgh.'

"'What on earth are you going to do in Edinburgh?'

"'I am going to my brother Willie, at the college.'

"'But the college is over now.'

"'I know that,' said Ellen.

"'What's his address?' the carrier went on.

"'I don't know,' answered Ellen.

"'It's a lucky thing that I know, then. But you have no business to leave home this way.'

"'Oh yes, I have.'

"'I am sure your father did not know of it, for when he gave me a letter this morning to take to Willie, he did not say a word about you.'

“‘He thought I was asleep in my bed,’ returned Ellen, trying to smile. But the thought that the carrier had actually seen her father since she left home was too much for her, and she cried again.

“‘I can’t go back with you now,’ said the carrier, ‘so you must go on with me.’

“‘That’s just what I want,’ said Ellen.

“‘Well, put on your shoes and stockings, my dear. Bare feet and this bleak morning air go poorly together. We’ll see what we can do.’

“Then he heaped in a corner of the cart some of the straw with which it was packed, threw a tarpaulin on top, lifted the little girl upon it, and covered her with a few empty sacks.

“‘Isn’t this near Edinburgh?’ she asked, wistfully, for it seemed to her they were very, very far from home.

“The carrier shook his head, looked puzzled, chirruped thoughtfully to his horses, and off they started.

“Ellen was so happy, and warm, and comfortable when she found herself going safely on her way in the carrier’s cart, that she fell fast asleep.

“When she awoke, he gave her some bread and cheese for her breakfast, and some water out of a brook that crossed the road, and then Ellen began to look about her. The rain had ceased and the sun was shining, and the country looked very pleasant; but Ellen thought it a strange country. She could see so much farther! And corn was growing everywhere, and there was not a sheep to be seen, and there were many cows feeding in the fields.

“‘Are we near Edinburgh?’ she asked.

“‘Oh, no!’ answered the carrier; ‘we are a long way from Edinburgh yet.’

“And so they journeyed on. The day was flecked all over

with sunshine and rain; and when the rain's turn came, Ellen would creep under a corner of the tarpaulin till it was over. They slept part of the night at a small town they passed through.

"Ellen thought it a very long way to Edinburgh, though the carrier was kind to her. At length she spied, far away, a great hill, that looked like a couching lion.

" 'Do you see the hill,' said that carrier.

" 'I am just looking at it,' answered Ellen.

" 'Edinburgh lies at the foot of that hill.'

" 'Oh!' said Ellen; and scarcely took her eyes off it till it went out of sight again.

"Reaching the brow of an eminence, they saw Arthur's Seat (as the carrier said the hill was called) once more, and below it a grand, jagged ridge of what Ellen took to be broken rocks. But the carrier told her that was the Old Town of Edinburgh. Those fierce-looking splinters on the edge of the mass were the roofs, gables, and chimneys of the great houses once inhabited by the nobility of Scotland. But when you come near the houses you find them shabby-looking; for they are full of poor people, who cannot keep them clean and nice.

"At length the cart stopped at a public-house in the Grass-market—a wide, open place, with strange old houses all round it, and a huge rock, with a castle on its top, towering over it. There Ellen got down.

" 'I can't go with you till I've unloaded my cart,' said the carrier.

" 'I don't want you to go with me, please,' said Ellen. 'I think Willie would rather not. Please give me father's letter.'

"So the carrier gave her the letter, and got a little boy of the landlady's to show her the way up the West-bow—a street of tall houses, so narrow that you might have shaken hands

across it from window to window. But those houses are all pulled down now, I am sorry to say, and the street Ellen went up has vanished.

“From the West-bow they went up a stair into the High Street, and thence into a narrow court, and then up a winding stair, and so came to the floor where Willie’s lodging was. Then the little boy left Ellen.

“Ellen knocked two or three times before anybody came; and when at last a woman opened the door, what do you think the woman did the moment she inquired after Willie? She shut the door in her face with a fierce scolding word. For Willie had vexed her that morning, and she thoughtlessly took her revenge upon Ellen without even asking her a question. Then, indeed, for a moment, Ellen’s courage gave way. All at once she felt dreadfully tired, and sat down upon the stair and cried. And the landlady was so angry with Willie that she forgot all about the little girl that wanted to see him.

“So for a whole hour Ellen sat upon the stair, moving only to let people pass. She felt dreadfully miserable, but had not the courage to knock again, for fear of having the door shut in her face yet more hopelessly. At last a woman came up and knocked at the door. Ellen rose trembling and stood behind her. The door opened; the woman was welcomed; she entered. The door was again closing when Ellen cried out in an agony:

“‘Please, ma’am, I want to see my brother Willie!’ and burst into sobs.

“The landlady, her wrath having by this time cooled, was vexed with herself and ashamed that she had not let the child in.

“‘Bless me!’ she cried; ‘have you been there all this time? Why didn’t you tell me you were that fellow’s sister?’

Come in. You won't find him in, though. It's not much of his company we get, I can tell you.'

" 'I don't want to come in, then,' sobbed Ellen. 'Please to tell me where he is, ma'am.'

" 'How should I know where he is? At no good, I warrant. But you had better come in and wait, for it's your only chance of seeing him before to-morrow morning.'

"With a sore heart, Ellen went in and sat down by the kitchen fire. And the landlady and her visitor sat and talked together, every now and then casting a look at Ellen, who kept her eyes on the ground, waiting with all her soul till Willie should come. Every time the landlady looked, Ellen's sad face went deeper into her heart; so that, before she knew what was going on in herself, she quite loved the child; for she was a kind-hearted woman, though she was sometimes cross.

"In a few minutes she went up to Ellen and took her bonnet off. Ellen submitted without a word. Then she made her a cup of tea; and while Ellen was taking it she asked her a great many questions. Ellen answered them all; and the landlady stared with amazement at the child's courage and resolution, and thought with herself:

" 'Well, if anything can get Willie out of his bad ways, this little darling will do it.'

"Then she made her go to Willie's bed, promising to let her know the moment he came home.

"Ellen slept and slept till it was night. When she woke it was dark, but a light was shining through beneath the door. So she rose and put on her frock and shoes and stockings, and went to the kitchen.'

" 'You see he's not come yet,' said the landlady.

" 'Where can he be?' returned Ellen, sadly.

" 'Oh! he'll be drinking with some of his companions in the public-house, I suppose.'

“‘Where is the public-house?’

“‘There are hundreds of them, child.’

“‘I know the place he generally goes to,’ said a young tradesman who sat by the fire.

“He had a garret-room in the house, and knew Willie by sight. And he told the landlady in a low voice where it was.

“‘Oh! do tell me, please sir,’ cried Ellen. ‘I want to get him home.’

“‘You don’t think he’ll mind you, do you?’

“‘Yes, I do,’ returned Ellen, confidently.

“‘Well, I’ll show you the way, if you like; but you’ll find it a rough place, I can tell you. You’ll wish yourself out of it pretty soon, with or without Willie.’

“‘I won’t leave it without him,’ said Ellen, tying on her bonnet.

“‘Stop a bit,’ said the landlady. ‘I’ll go along.’

“The landlady put on her bonnet, and out they all went into the street.

“What a wonder it *might* have been to Ellen! But she only knew that she was in the midst of great lights, and carts and carriages rumbling over the stones, and windows full of pretty things, and crowds of people jostling along the pavements. In all the show she wanted nothing but Willie.

“The young man led them down a long, dark close through an archway, and then into a court off the close, and then up an outside stone stair to a low-browed door, at which he knocked.

“‘I don’t much like the look of this place,’ said the landlady.

“‘Oh! there’s no danger, I dare say, if you keep quiet. They’ll never hurt the child. Besides, her brother’ll see to that.’

“Presently the door was opened, and the young man asked after Willie.

“‘Is he in?’ he said.

“‘He may be, or he may not,’ answered a fat, frouzy woman, in a dirty cotton dress. ‘Who wants him?’

“‘This little girl.’

“‘Please, ma’am, I’m his sister.’

“‘We want no sisters here.’

“And she tried to close the door. I dare say the landlady remembered with shame that that was just what she had done that morning.

“‘Come! come!’ interposed the young tradesman, putting his foot between the door and the post; ‘don’t be foolish. Surely you won’t go to keep a child like that from speaking to her own brother! Why, the Queen herself would let her in.’

“This softened the woman a little, and she hesitated, with the latch in her hand.

“‘Mother wants him,’ said Ellen. ‘She’s very ill. I heard her cry about Willie. Let me in.’

“She took hold of the woman’s hand, who drew it away hastily, but stepped back, at the same time, and let her enter. She then resumed her place at the door.

“‘Not a one of *you* shall come in!’ she said, as if justifying the child’s admission by the exclusion of the others.

“‘We don’t want to,’ said the young man. ‘But we’ll just see that no harm comes to her.’

“‘D’ye think I’m not enough for that?’ said the woman, with scorn. ‘Let me see who dares to touch her! But you may stay where you are, if you like. The air’s free.’

“So saying, she closed the door, with a taunting laugh.

“The passage was dark in which Ellen found herself; but she saw a light at the further end, through a key-hole, and heard the sounds of loud talk and louder laughter. Before

the woman had closed the outer door, she had reached this room; nor did the woman follow, either to guide or prevent her.

“A pause came in the noise. She tapped at the door.

“‘Come in!’ cried some one; and she entered.

“Around a table were seated four youths, drinking. Of them, one was Willie, with flushed face and flashing eyes. They all stared when the child stood before them, in her odd, old-fashioned bonnet, and her little shawl pinned at the throat. Willie stared as much as any of them.

“‘Willie! Willie!’ cried Ellen; and would have rushed to him, but the table was between.

“‘What do you want here, Ellen? Who the deuce let you come here?’ said Willie, not quite unkindly.

“‘I want you, Willie. Come home with me. Oh! please come home with me.’

“‘I can’t now, Ellen, you see,’ he answered. Then, turning to his companions, ‘How could the child have found her way here?’ he said, looking ashamed as he spoke.

“‘You’re fetched. That’s all,’ said one of them, with a sneer. ‘Mother’s sent for you.’

“‘Go along!’ said another; ‘and mind you don’t catch it when you get home!’

“‘Nobody will say a word to you, Willie,’ interposed Ellen.

“‘Be a good boy, and don’t do it again!’ said the third, raising his glass to his lips.

“Willie tried to laugh, but was evidently vexed.

“‘What are you standing there for, Ellen?’ he said, sharply ‘This is no place for you.’

“‘Nor for you either, Willie,’ returned Ellen, without moving.

“‘We’re all very naughty, aren’t we, Ellen?’ said the first.

“ ‘Come and give me a kiss, and I’ll forgive you,’ said the second.

“ ‘You sha’n’t have your brother ; so you may trudge home again without him,’ said the third.

“ And then they all burst out laughing, except Willie.

“ ‘Do go away, Ellen !’ he said angrily.

“ ‘Where am I to go to ?’ she asked.

“ ‘Where you came from.’

“ ‘That’s home,’ said Ellen ; ‘but I can’t go home to-night, and I daren’t go home without you. Mother would die. She’s very ill, Willie. I heard her crying last night.’

“ It seemed to Ellen at the moment that it was only last night she left home.

“ ‘I’ll just take the little fool to my lodgings and come back directly,’ said Willie, rather stricken at this mention of his mother.

“ ‘Oh, yes ! Do as you’re bid !’ they cried, and burst out laughing again.

“ But Willie was angry now.

“ ‘I tell you what,’ he said, ‘I’ll go when and where I like. I don’t need to ask *your* leave,—do I ?’

“ Two of them were silent now, because they were afraid of Willie ; for he was big and strong. The third, however, said, with a sneer.

“ ‘Go with its little sister to its little mammy !’

“ Now, Willie could not get out, so small was the room and so large the table, except one or other of those next him rose to let him pass. Neither did. Willie, therefore, jumped on the table, kicked the tumbler of the one who had last spoken into the breast of his shirt, jumped down again, took Ellen by the hand, and left the house.

“ ‘The rude boys !’ said Ellen. ‘I would never go near them again, if I was you, Willie.’

"But Willie said never a word, for he was not pleased with Ellen, or with himself, or with his *friends*.

"When they got into the house he said, abruptly :

"What's the matter with your mother, Ellen?"

"I don't know, Willie; but I don't think she'll ever get better. I'm sure father doesn't think it either."

"Willie was silent for a long time. Then he said :

"How did you come here, Ellen?"

"And Ellen told him the whole story.

"And now you'll come home with me, Willie," she added, "and we shall be so happy,—father and mother, and all,—so happy!"

"It was very foolish of you, Ellen. To think you could bring me home if I didn't choose!"

"But you do choose,—don't you, Willie?"

"You might as well have written," he said.

"Then Ellen remembered her father's letter, which the carrier had given her. And she took it out of her pocket, and gave it to Willie. And Willie took it, and sat down, with his back to Ellen, and read it through. Then he burst out crying, and laid his head on his arms and cried harder yet. And Ellen got upon a bar of the chair—for he was down on the table—and leaned over him, and put her arms 'round his neck, and said, crying herself all the time :

"Nobody said a word to the black lamb when Jumper brought him home, Willie. We were all so glad to see him!"

"And Willie lifted his head, and put his arms around Ellen, and drew her face to his, and kissed her as he used to kiss her years ago.

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"They went home with the carrier next day. Their father didn't say much when he saw Willie. But he held out his

hand with a half smile on his lips, and a look in his eye like the moon before a storm.

“And his mother held out her arms, and drew him down to her bosom, and stroked his hair, and prayed God to bless Willie, her boy.

“‘And did she grow better?’ I think I hear you ask. Yes, she did; but not very soon.

“‘And Ellen,—weren’t they glad to see Ellen?’ They made more of Willie than they did of Ellen.

“‘And wasn’t Ellen sorry?’ No; she never noticed it,—she was so busy making much of Willie, too.

“But when she went to bed that night, her father kissed her and said: ‘The blessin’ o’ an auld father be upo’ ye, my wee bairn!’”

I was a little disappointed with the cool way in which some of the children received this story. Yet as they immediately cried out for another, I thought I should like, just for experiment’s sake, to try one I had by me. I therefore read as follows:—

“THE SNOW-FIGHT.

“In a certain village in the north of Scotland there were two schools; the one the ordinary parish school, of the kind to which most Scotchmen owe the beginnings of what education they may have; the other a school founded by the will of a childless old man for the sake of conferring educational privileges upon boys of certain surnames, which had belonged to different branches of his family. I will not pretend to determine whether this mode of limiting the persons who should enjoy those privileges was a wise or a foolish one: but indubitably it gave rise to certain habits of feeling which were not favourable to the development of genuine greatness of character. In the first place, all who belonged to that school considered them-

selves, in virtue of being educated by an old charity, as a sort of aristocracy amongst the boys of the neighbourhood ; and in the next, there being not more than half-a-dozen surnames in the whole school, some of which were by tradition those of hereditary foes, it gave occasion, at a time when all such things were forgotten in the world at large, for a great deal of party-feeling and rivalry, there being an almost constant feud between the boys of certain names, which led to combinations and quarrels and fights, and what was perhaps worse, a certain unscrupulous currying of favour with the weaker parties, so that the school was generally divided into two main sections, opposed to each other in all internal policy to such a degree that a pitched battle was now and then the unavoidable consequence of disputes coming to a head, after which things would be quieter for a season. Upon the other school, of course, they looked down with contempt.

“The High School, as it was called, partly perhaps from the fact that the schoolroom was on the first floor of the building, and accessible only by an outside stone stair, was composed of boys from all parts of the country, possessing any of the names which gave the right of entrance. On the whole they belonged to a higher social position than the boys who went to the open school, for it is generally the case that when anything worth having is to be had for nothing, those who are better able to go without it are the first to claim and also the first to secure it. This of course tended greatly to keep up their feeling of superiority to the boys of the other, namely, the parish school ; and so strong was this feeling that there was little communication between them even in the way of rivalry or dispute. Probably, however, there would have been fighting enough, had it not been that the constant divisions of the High School gave quite sufficient outlet to the animal necessity most boys seem to have for fighting.

"This will be sufficient to render my little story intelligible.

"One Wednesday, being half-holiday, the boys of the High School rushed shouting into the village street. You would have thought from the noise they made that some great scheme was on foot—nothing less probably than the conquest of the habitable globe; but there was no scheme at all in their heads. They made noises, uncouth and sometimes to the sensitive ear distressing, only as the birds sing, because they must—because the something inside them must express its vague and tumultuous being in crude and discordant outcry.

"It was one o'clock, and the shadows were falling across the street—very black, for they fell on the whitest of snow. There had been days and days of steady, huge-flaked fall—then frost—then days of a powdery sprinkling as of the ashes of a wood-fire—then more silent frost. The snow had become as loose and inadhesive as sand. No persuasion would make it stick together, and very little fun of any sort was to be got out of it. Such had been its condition when they entered the schoolroom in the morning.

"But all the time they had been busy with their lessons—for there was much work done during school-hours at that school, and very little beyond them—the sun had been shining with a rare brilliance; and the sky overhead was cloudless, and of a thin, cold blue. Beyond the street, the rich fields, and the great low hills to whose moorland desolation they sloped up, were all covered with the same solid white, dazzling the eye that sought to determine the well-known but now half-obliterated lines of the country.

"It was a curious little street. Low gables of stone-built cottages, several of them broken into corbel-steps, and most of them pierced with only one or two little windows, leaving a large space of unfeatured wall, a mere defence against the weather; now and then the front of a more pretentious house of two

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stories and four or five windows ; here a little shop with peg-tops, called *pears* in that part, but pronounced *peers*, and gingerbread nuts, called *gibbery*, mingled in the harmonious confusion of human necessities ; then the staring new-built residence of the chief tradesman of the place, next to a little chapel—such were the principal features of the street, unessential to my story, I confess—only you cannot help thinking a little of what your frame shall be when you want to hang up your new-bought picture. On each side of the street lay a beaten path ; and the snow between the paths looked as if it were feathers, and had bulged up the more for the treading down upon the sides—the whitest of goose-feathers.

“I have said that all the time the boys had been at their work, the sun had been at his. He could not help the crops much at this time of the year ; he could not even, in the state of the wind—over which he had little control, seeing it was an affair of the world’s own, and didn’t reach within 89,999,960 miles of him—get rid of the snow for them ; but what he could do, he did—he melted the top of it, and left it honeycombed. What he melted ran down warm, comparatively, and softened the rest ; so that when Fraser and Ferguson, Anderson and Wylie, Black and White, rushed from the High School, moved as by a common instinct, they plunged their hands into old Mother Goose’s feathers, and commenced snowballing as indiscriminately as furiously. The indiscrimination did not, however, last long. As boy after boy came up, he sided with this one or that one according to occult principles, until at last, no one could have described how, the whole of the school was divided into two, and those the parties belonging to the two names I first mentioned above—the Frasers and the Fergusons. The former had soon the best of it, and drove the Fergusons right through and out of the street into the open.

“The leader of the Frasers was a fine-grown youth of four-

teen, in preparation for the university. He was strong, frank, brave, with a preference for one thing over another in proportion to the number of muscles it brought into action. His main vitality seemed to go out in setting his body in motion. For the rest, he was good-natured when his pride was not hurt; and generous, when his distinction was not menaced.

"The leader of the Fergusons was nothing very remarkable, and hence probably it was that his party was driven so soon from the street into the country. He was seconded by able and willing subordinates—few of whom however were fit to rule and direct.

"Amongst them was one lad of about twelve, concerning whom I must say a word before I go further. His name was Andrew Ferguson, the only son of the widow of a lieutenant in the navy, who lived in lodgings in a little cottage in the main street. He inherited his mother's delicacy of constitution, and along with it her gentleness of disposition—a pale-faced boy with big eyes, ready to flash, but generally quiet. He did his work conscientiously—a fact acknowledged by the master, who, if ever Andrew told him he had been unable to do this or that, never asked him a question as to the why or wherefore; but he had no great store of animal spirits, and unpersuaded seldom took part in the more boisterous frolics. At times, however, when he happened to feel better than usual, his spirits would rise and he would be ready for any amount of exertion for a little while. He was a great favourite with some of the boys, but others regarded him with a dislike bordering on contempt, partly because he excelled them in the class, and partly because he kept so much to himself, joining in so few of their sports. They called him a sneak and a molly. In reality he had far higher as well as more delicate notions of things than any other boy in the school.

"As they rushed into the keen air this early afternoon, the

bright sunshine, the expectation of early-done lessons and a long evening to sit devouring a book of arctic voyages beside his mother, elevated his spirits to so high a pitch, that, finding the snowballing in full vigour, he joined in it with might and main, and was with his party driven out of the village into the open fields, where the work went on without the fear of broken windows and scolding dames. Presently, however, a new aspect and interest was given to the amusement.

“The parish school was a little way out of the village, and a few of its scholars who lived there were returning home, snowballing of course as they came. Intentionally or otherwise, one of their missiles struck the leader of the Frasers a pretty smart blow on the head. He turned in a rage, and with his company commenced a furious attack on them. Having been dismissed rather later than the High School, and being yet at no great distance from their own, their cries reached those who were following them, and also the country lads, who had yet scarcely started on their way home ; so that, in a few minutes, the Fraser party was greatly outnumbered. When the Fergusons, who had desisted as soon as their foes turned to assault the new comers, saw that their own men were likely to get the worst of it, they laid intestine conflict aside for the moment, and rushed to their assistance, most of them with an armful of ready-made snowballs. The result was that the other school was speedily put to flight, and was pursued across the fields towards a little grove of firs that stood on a rising ground. Between this grove and the field next to it, lay a pretty deep ditch, with a run of water in the bottom of it, but of course full of snow. The defeated party hoped to gain the shelter of the thicket, and there make a stand against their pursuers, of whom Andrew was one of the foremost.

“Already the greater part of the enemy had crossed the ditch upon the snow, and were busy heaping piles of balls be-

hind trees, when a well-kneaded and well-shot ball from his hand struck one of the rear, just as he reached the ditch, right on the back of the neck, and tumbled him in the snow—in such a soft place, that, as he struggled to rise, he sunk deeper and deeper, until his feet were in the water at the bottom. Andrew was up with him in a moment. The boy looked round, and Andrew saw that he was crying a little: the blow had been a severe one. At the same moment he recognized him as the son of a widow like his mother, and very poor. Pity seized him, and the pale face of the half-fed boy went to his heart. He laid hold of him at once and helped him out of the ditch. But he was doubly sorry when he saw, not merely how wet he was, but that all he had to shelter his feet was hardly worthy of the name of shoes,—the sole of one of them hanging nearly half off, and the other tied to his foot with string. It was all the soft-hearted Andrew could do to keep from crying also, especially when he thought that it was his snowball that had sent him floundering in the ditch. Already his strength had begun to fail him, and now sympathy with poor Johnny Webster rendered him altogether unfit to continue the combat. So, suggesting to Johnny that he had better go home, and beginning to turn over in his mind what could be done to get a pair of shoes for him, he was about to leave the battle to those who cared to pursue it, when he saw Fraser coming towards them, with great strides, looking angry.

“‘I’ve got you,’ he bawled. ‘You’re the fellow that hit me when I wasn’t even looking your way. I’ll teach you better manners.’

“‘It wasn’t me,’ said Webster.

“But Fraser called him a liar, took him by the collar, and, unmoved by his pitiful condition, began to thrash him. At this Andrew’s blood boiled. He rushed at Fraser with such

force that he shoved him off the struggling boy, who immediately took to his sloppy heels and ran down the hill, while Fraser, in a boiling fury, came up to Andrew.

“ ‘ You’re a nice fellow, to turn against your own school for the sake of an impudent beggar like that ! ’ he cried.

“ ‘ It was a shame to hit him,’ said Andrew.

“ ‘ Well, you take that for him, till I catch him up.’

“ So saying he knocked Andrew down, and ran after Webster.

“ Andrew was up in a moment, but everything reeled about him. He had never been knocked down before, and although the snow was soft enough, he did not find it at all a pleasant experience. Coming to himself, however, and seeing Fraser at full speed down the hill after Webster, he followed as fast as he could. Just as his enemy reached him, Webster dodged and Fraser shot past. By the time the last had succeeded in stopping himself, Andrew had got up with Webster, and as Fraser, more furious than ever, came up the hill again, Andrew stood ready to meet him, calling out to Webster to run. In an instant he was flat in the snow again, and Fraser after Webster. Indeed Andrew knew nothing about fighting, and had never in his life struck a boy in the face.

“ When he rose once more, he found his spirits and strength utterly gone. Some heads can bear blows better than others—whether because their skulls are thicker, or because the brains are coarser, I cannot tell ; but Andrew’s at all events had never been used to such treatment, and the second blow was worse in its effects than the first. So unfit was he to persist in his opposition to Fraser, that for some moments he looked stupidly after the two boys—by this time nearly at the bottom of the hill, Fraser following more carefully than before, lest the cunning of poor Webster should once more delay his expected vengeance. But coming suddenly to himself,

Andrew cried, 'O Lord! I am a coward!' and ran down the hill.

"I stop my story here to inform my readers that the words I have written above were not an irreverent exclamation; for in any emergency Andrew could not help thinking first of a great Help that seemed overhead somewhere; and now, conscious of his weakness, and in terror lest he should prove a coward, what better could he do than cry thus aloud?

"Before he got up with them again, Fraser was fiercely pommelling poor Webster. Andrew rushed at Fraser, and threw his arms round him from behind. Webster, once more breaking loose, ran limping, with one shoe, home to his mother.

"Fraser now set himself to give Ferguson the thrashing he considered him to have so justly earned; for instead of sparing him because he was a less boy, he only counted his presumption the greater. He took no account of the fact that Andrew had not struck him: he had interfered with his vengeance. Therefore, although his helplessness, and utter loss of buoyancy from fatigue and former blows, rendered him incapable of self-defence, and all he attempted was to shelter his head and face with his arms from the assault of his enemy, Fraser did not leave him until the blood was streaming from his nose, and he lay almost insensible.

"When he came to himself, he rose and crept home to his mother, and told her all about it. She, though proud enough of the behaviour of her boy, was in great distress at his condition. He had a very restless night, calling out many times in his sleep, 'O Lord! I am a coward!' and the next day he was quite unfit to get up.

"The day after, however, he was nearly well, and beyond a little swelling of the face, bore no marks of his maltreatment. A day with his mother had also done much to restore him to

his usual equanimity. But he was to have another consolation still. Going to school at the usual hour, and passing Johnny Webster's mother's door, he found her standing on the threshold, waiting, in fact, until he should pass—only he did not know that. She dropped him a courtesy, and thanked him for his kindness to her son, saying it was very brave of him to fight a boy so much bigger for the sake of another.

“ ‘But I didn't fight him,’ said Andrew.

“ ‘You came between him and my boy, anyhow,’ returned the mother ; ‘and Johnny says it was the bravest thing he ever saw done.’

“Although Andrew could not take to himself all the praise offered, yet the good opinion of the poor boy and his mother was a comfort to him.

“When he reached the school, he saw that, while he had been absent, the boys had erected a mighty snow-image in the playground, and they told him it was in honour of Fraser. For, yesterday, the boys of the parish-school had come down in organized force, and attacked the boys of the High School—with the same result, however, as before. The High School was hardly put to it for some time, and the battle raged tumultuously. The street had resounded with cries ; the old women had closed their outside shutters to protect their windows ; and the uproar of the battle had penetrated to the little back room where Andrew lay. But his head ached too much for his even caring to hear what it was all about. At length by the extraordinary exertions of Fraser, who had performed prodigies of valour, the tide was turned, and the parish school driven from the town, and again scattered in rout over the fields. Hence it was that both parties in the school had combined to raise a monument to their leader.

“When Andrew stood up in his class, the master asked what had become of him the day before. Now he would

neither tell a lie nor inform against Fraser, so he merely said he was unwell, and had been in bed all day, which was true enough. Fraser happened to be near and heard him ; and Andrew glancing up saw a sneer on his face, which meant—‘Ah ! you’re wise. You know what you would catch if you were to mention my name in it.’

“When school was over, a good many boys gathered round the snow-image, and a good deal of admiration was expressed—both of the image itself and of the deeds which had led to this honourable mention. Andrew, however, merely said,—

“ ‘It’s not a bit like him.’

“ ‘Why, you silly !’ cried one, ‘how could a snow-image be like anybody ?’

“ ‘Why not ?’ retorted Andrew. ‘Just you let me get on your back, and I’ll show you how.’

“The boy bent down ; Andrew leaped upon his back, and stood up on his shoulders, whence he could reach the face of the statue. Having a good perception of form, and a remarkable notion of doing the thing he meant, he had in a very few minutes made it at least a good deal less unlike Fraser, while the imagination of the boys supplying much that was not there, they began to shout their admiration aloud. This attracted some of the bigger boys, and amongst the rest the original whose fame it was intended to perpetuate. He fancied that Andrew was taking his revenge on him by insulting his statue, for anything mean in his own nature always makes a person capable of believing mean things of another.

“ ‘Come down there, you young rascal !’ he cried, ‘or I’ll stick your head in the snow.’

“By this time, however, Andrew had got so much interested in what he was about, that he was not at all willing to give it up.

“ ‘No, no,’ he cried. ‘You just stand there for a few

minutes where I can see your side face. It's coming right.'

" 'Yes, yes, Fraser,' cried one of the big boys, 'I declare the little beggar is actually making it like you.'

" So entreated, Fraser stood for a while, talking away to the rest, who were much interested in the progress of the work. At length, however, he began to get tired.

" 'Have you nearly done yet?' he asked, speaking less gruffly than before.

" 'Not yet,' answered Ferguson.

" 'Do you think I'm going to stand here all the afternoon to be made a guy of by you?'

" Andrew said nothing, only kept looking from Fraser to the statue, and from the statue to Fraser, with many motions of deft fingers, and of a little stick which he had whittled into a modelling tool. The others kept entreating him to patience, and the consequence was that Fraser stood for a whole hour at the pleasure of Andrew. At last he could endure it no longer, and turned away.

" Still Andrew went on ; and all the boys were declaring it was as like as Fraser to himself.

" 'Come down !' cried Fraser, looking back. 'You'll spoil what's well enough.'

" Andrew, feeling rather tired—he had had half-a-dozen different supporters by this time—slid down the back of the boy, and went up to Fraser.

" 'I'm much obliged to you,' he said. 'It's great fun.'

" 'You like that better than a thrashing?' said Fraser, laying his hand not unkindly on his shoulder.

" 'Yes, I do,' said Andrew.

" 'You won't try that on again?' said Fraser.

" 'Try what on?' said Andrew.

" 'Standing up to me,' said Fraser.

“ ‘I didn’t stand up to you,’ said Andrew ; ‘I’m not such a fool as that. But what I did do I’ll do again, if it’s got to be done.’

“ ‘Hey, hey !’ said Fraser, taking his hand from his shoulder and looking him in the face. ‘What does that mean ?’

“ ‘It only means that if you’re going to thrash a poor half-starved boy that can’t defend himself, it’ll be my turn to—’

“ ‘But *you* can’t defend yourself a bit better,’ said Fraser. ‘You’re no better than a woman at fighting, you !’

“ ‘I can take his thrashing though,’ said Andrew. ‘I can bear it better, for I’ve got plenty to eat, and shoes to my feet, and he hasn’t. It *was* a shame of you to hit a fellow like that.’

“ Fraser looked as if he were just on the edge of falling upon him once more. But either shame before his companions, or some better feeling, prevented him. He shoved him away with such roughness that he fell. But snow is nice to fall in, and Andrew was nothing the worse. He picked himself up, and went home to his mother.

“ ‘There, that’s what you’ve made of me !’ said Fraser to Andrew with contempt the next morning, as he went up to the snow-image before entering the school.

“ ‘It’s what the change in the wind has made of you,’ said Andrew.

“ Certainly the snow-statue was now a pitiable object. Its nose had nearly run away with its chin, and it bore scarcely a resemblance to the face—I will not say of Fraser, but of a human being—so flattened and melted was it. Before they came out of school, its head had sunk on its shoulders, and dwindled to the size of a cocoa-nut ; for a soft drizzly rain had been falling upon it ever since six o’clock ; and before the next morning, there was nothing of it left but a shapeless heap that lay by itself in the midst of the play-ground.

“Years went on, and Andrew grew in body and in mind, and prospered. He had great facility with his hands, could use many tools, and seemed to get acquainted with engineering almost by instinct. But he was such a good-hearted boy, that he could not be satisfied without turning his efforts to some direct good to his fellows. It was this tenderness towards his kind, quite as much as the delicacy of his health in boyhood, which unfitted him for strife, and made him recoil from planting a blow in a human face: it seemed to him almost horrible to strike that living, shining thing. It is not, therefore, to be wondered at, that of all employments he should choose the profession of a doctor, for in that he thought he could at once come to the aid of humanity.

“In Scotland it is much easier to meet college expenses than in England; and although Andrew’s mother was poor enough, she contrived, by going with him and managing everything for him—for in Scotland the students do not live within the college-gates, but wherever they please—to educate him as a doctor. In order to take some of the weight off her, and at the same time to be as early useful as possible, even before he had gained his diploma, he made more than one voyage in a whaling vessel as surgeon; and although the pay was scanty, it seemed to his poor mother a mine of wealth each time he laid it unimpaired in her lap. Nothing else turning up at the time, and being still very young, he made several more voyages of the same kind after he had his degree, partly because, even when as a boy he shrunk from all contest with humanity, he had a wild delight in battling with the elements, and had never known what fear in relation to them was.

“Andrew had no interest with great people to further him in his profession, and his father’s services to his country were by this time all but forgotten. Fraser, on the contrary, had

already had more than one Government appointment, for he had many friends of influence. He was a young man of very considerable faculty, versatile, and familiar with many things in a half-practical, half-theoretical fashion, while he knew the first principles of nothing. He was fond of easy adventure and constant change, and so it came about that he sought and obtained an appointment in a Government expedition to search for the open sea said to lie about the north pole. His duty was, however, merely to record the scientific and other facts of the voyage for the use of the Government and the country.

“Mrs. Ferguson recognized in the name of the officer appointed to the charge of the expedition, a comrade of her husband’s of whom he had often spoken, and who had once spent a day with him and her. She mentioned this to her son, who happened to be at home at the time, and he immediately went to London, and applied for the post of surgeon in his vessel. This fortunately it was in Captain B——’s power to give him, and he soon found that he had not only secured a good surgeon, but an able coadjutor; for not merely was Andrew familiar with the ways of the northern elements, but during his voyages he had made himself a thorough sailor as well, while his love of mechanics had led him to acquaint himself with all the working of naval engines and their management.

“The vessel in which they sailed was a small iron steamer, stronger than any that had hitherto been built; for it was determined to give the ice a strong nut to crack, if it should attempt to treat it in such a fashion, as was a good deal more than likely. Her tough iron shell was supported within by a mighty frame of iron beams and ties, and she was furnished with both paddles and screw, that she might go like a fish by the tail, if her swimming arms should be disabled.

The vessel which accompanied her was smaller, and not so strongly built, though still better fitted for encountering the fierceness of the north than any other that had yet left the shores of England. The decks of both were paved with concentrated fuel, made into the shape of bricks, and they carried a great stock of coal; for their fuel would be the very sinews of their coming war with the elements.

“With the voyage itself, its failure or success, I have nothing to do in my story. I only want to relate an incident of it in which the two young men came once more into collision, but under very different circumstances and with very different results.

“When they first met, it was as strangers. Ferguson knew Fraser at the first glance; but whether Fraser knew Ferguson I cannot with certainty say. I suspect he did. Not being in the least degree cured of the overweening sense of his own importance which had been so much against his worth and character from the first, I suspect he fancied it more dignified to forget all the relations of boyhood with Andrew Ferguson. I don’t mean that he was ashamed of the way he had treated him, but that he considered their positions in life so different both then and now that there was no occasion to refer to any former acquaintance. When therefore they were introduced to each other, each bowed, and nothing was said. Nor did they come to anything more than the merest remark during the first half of the voyage. Indeed they were too much unlike to like each other much.

“Captain B—— was a thorough man, which means a good deal more than a thorough gentleman—fine thing as that is. Partly, I dare say, from regard for his old friend, he made a new one of his son, and trusted him immensely, consulting him on various occasions; for the captain was one of those good men who stand only on the truth of things, and on the

dignity neither of their office nor of their personal claims. To such men, in the end, there is tenfold honour given, even by those who are of themselves incapable of appreciating them.

“One day, when the weather was clear, and not a sign of snow or wind in the air, Captain B—— took it into his head to go after some seals which had been spied from the other vessel upon the ice at some distance. I ought to explain, however, that certain repairs had become necessary to that vessel, from an accident to the machinery; and that while these were going on, the other had of course lain to to wait for her; under which circumstances the captain of the *Swordfish* had judged it unobjectionable to join the captain of the *Sea-mew* in a seal-hunt. I may add, although the fact was not entered in his notes by Mr. Fraser, that Captain B—— was very desirous of taking home to his wife seal-skins enough for a large cloak.

“As it happened, the chief officer under Captain B—— was that day confined to his berth; for which reason the captain, as he went over the ship's side, said to Andrew,—

“‘Mr. Ferguson, I leave the vessel in your charge.’

“‘Very well, sir,’ returned Andrew.

“‘And,’ added Captain B——, ‘if you should fancy any signs of a change in the weather before I return, get up your steam, and join the *Sea-mew*, lest anything should happen to her while she's disabled. I don't think there's much chance, but it's as well to look out.’

“‘Very well, sir,’ said Ferguson once more, and the captain departed.

“I believe Fraser was no great favourite on board. Anyhow he was not of the company the captain took with him seal-hunting. Indeed, except a man to carry a harpoon with a short line and a double-barrelled rifle, the captain took only

his nephew, who had come out with him as a volunteer, and acted as second lieutenant.

"The day was bright and clear. There was a good deal of floe all about them, but it was hardly drifting, and there was a wide, open channel between them and the *Sea-mew*. About noon, however, the air began to grow thick, and when Andrew saw this, he directed the stokers to get up the steam. They were soon slowly moving towards their companion.

"Suddenly, however, Ferguson descried masses of floe—that is broken fragments of field-ice—drifting between them; and in a few moments more the wind began to blow—bitterly cold, and full of snowflakes. Before the steam was sufficient to get any good way on the vessel, the masses of ice were thick between them and the *Saw-mew*.

"It was a rather anxious thing for Andrew to have both the vessels, as it were, thus in his charge. He saw well enough that there was no time to be lost; but he could not make more speed than the supply of steam would permit; and, anxious to save their fuel, they had been keeping the fires low while they lay to. Whatever could be done must now be done to get up the steam.

Every man on board the *Swordfish* had been either captain or mate of a whaling vessel. On their way northwards they had caught a good fish, and had stored the blubber in casks against possible necessity, for they could not tell under what circumstances they might have to spend the winter. Ferguson now gave orders to feed the furnaces with this blubber, until the steam was thoroughly up. Then he took his place on one of the paddle-boxes, to give orders to the man at the wheel.

"Fraser had been writing below, and now came on deck.

"'What horrible smell is this?' he called up to Ferguson.

"'They're feeding the furnaces with blubber,' he answered.

“ ‘What’s that for? Where’s the captain?’

“ ‘He’s not come on board yet.’

“ ‘By whose orders, then, have they been getting up the steam and getting under way?’ asked Fraser pompously.

“ ‘By my orders.’

“ ‘By yours?’

“ ‘Yes. The captain left me in charge.’

“ ‘Where are you making for?’

“ ‘To join the *Sea-mew*.’

“ ‘Is that by his orders?’

“ ‘Certainly it is.’

“ They were now threading their way among the masses of loose ice, and it required careful steering; for although none they yet saw could have injured the hull of the tough *Swordfish* they might have hurt the paddles, and it was far better to keep clear of them. Therefore, as Fraser kept on with questions in the same irritating style, Ferguson at length said,—

“ ‘Mr. Fraser, I am in charge of the *Swordfish*, as I told you. She requires all my attention, and I beg you will excuse me from continuing the conversation.’

“ Fraser turned away and paced the deck, looking in every direction with a critical air; but wrath and indignation were boiling in his bosom.

“ Before a half-hour was over, during which they had been carefully advancing, with growing speed, they came to a mass of level ice, so long that Ferguson could see neither end of it, stretching between them and the comparatively open water in which the *Sea-mew* lay; but it was very narrow—not more, in fact, than a few yards across. The sun was fast approaching the horizon, and if the long night came down upon them, they could not tell how far they might have drifted before morning. away from their companions. He ordered the engines to

slacken speed, and took two minutes to think of it. Knowing the strength of the vessel and the might of her engines, in two minutes he had made up his mind.

“‘Back her,’ he called down to the engineer; and she went back for a couple of hundred yards before he stopped her.

“‘Give her another barrel of blubber,’ he cried; ‘then set her at full speed, and look out. I’m ramming her at the ice ahead. Steady!’

“Fraser uttered a great oath, and rushed up on the paddle-box.

“‘Do you know what you’re about?’ he said.

“‘You don’t, or you would look out. You’ll be overboard, if you don’t mind. You’d better lay hold of the shrouds, or throw yourself on the deck. Get off the paddle-box, anyhow.’

“Ferguson spoke quickly, for there was no time to be lost.

“‘Stop her!’ shouted Fraser.

“Unaccustomed to any word of command but such as had a right to be heard, the engineer obeyed—but in time only to frustrate the full effect of the first blow on the ice: the *Sword-fish* ran mightily against it notwithstanding. Ferguson threw himself down on the paddle-box, and grasped Fraser by the leg, just a single moment before she struck. But for that grasp, Fraser would have been overboard. He fell with his head down the arc of the paddle-box, and hung suspended by his leg.

“‘Back her!’ shouted Ferguson, proceeding to get up and to haul up Fraser.

“Having succeeded, he led him down on deck, a good deal shaken and frightened.

“‘Mr. Fraser,’ he said, ‘if you utter one word more in contradiction of my orders, I will order you under arrest. You will soon see which of us the men will obey.’

“Fraser went below.

“Some years after I read a description of the *Swordfish*’s behaviour on this occasion. It made the blood dance in my veins. The next time she smote the ice, it was as with the sledge-hammer of Thor. She rushed at it like a live creature mad with mingled rage and delight, snorting out her fierce defiance. At the shock she shivered and recoiled, every inch of her trembling with one tremble, but a huge piece of ice was broken from the mass. Lying in the same position, however, as before, it would have acted as a fender or buffer against the subsequent strokes, had not Ferguson ordered a boat out, and set the men to tow it away. As soon as this was done, the *Swordfish* rushed again like a creature of the elements—as indeed she was—a creature of fire and water at least—with another magnificent charge upon the ice, and with equal success. Ten times was it repeated before the barrier was finally driven in two—every time the *Swordfish* seeming to have grown more furious. When the last piece broke away, and she drove it before her into the open sea, a great shout burst from the men who had hitherto crowded the deck in the silence of intense excitement, and away went the *Swordfish* careering towards the *Sea-mew*, no live creature, plainly, for she was as fresh as ever after her frightful exertions.

“From the deck of the *Sea-mew* the two captains had seen the whole. When they stepped together on board the triumphant battering-ram they shook hands with Ferguson, and lauded his conduct greatly, in the sight and hearing of all the ship’s company, the lieutenant and Fraser included, the latter having crept on deck at the first shock, but never offering to interfere with Ferguson’s orders.

“Andrew said nothing about Fraser’s conduct, and if the latter was not friendly during the rest of the voyage, at least he dropped the tone of superiority which he had hitherto affected towards his old schoolfellow.”

CHAPTER XVI.

A CHILD'S HOLIDAY.

WHEN the next evening of our assembly came, I could see on Adela's face a look of subdued expectation, and I knew not to what to attribute it: Harry was going to read. There was a restlessness in her eyelids—they were always rising, and falling as suddenly. But when the time drew near, they grew more still; only her colour went and came a little. By the time we were all seated, she was as quiet as death. Harry pulled out a manuscript.

"Have you any objection to a ballad-story?" he asked of the company generally.

"Certainly not," was the common reply; though Ralph stared a little, and his wife looked at him. I believe the reason was, that they had never known Harry write poetry before. But as soon as he had uttered the title—" *The Two Gordons* "—

"You young rascal!" cried his brother. "Am I to keep you in material for ever? Are you going to pluck my wings till they are as bare as an egg? Really, ladies and gentlemen," he continued, in pretended anger, while Harry was keeping down a laugh of keen enjoyment, "it is too bad of that scape-grace brother of mine! Of course you are all welcome to anything I have got; but he has no right to escape from his re-

sponsibilities on that account. It is rude to us all. I know he can write if he likes."

"Why, Ralph, you would be glad of such a brother to steal your sermons from, if you had been up all night as I was. Of course I did not mean to claim any more credit than that of unearthing some of your shy verses.—May I read them or not?"

"Oh! of course. But it is lucky I came prepared for some escapade of the sort, and brought a manuscript of proper weight and length in my pocket."

Suddenly Harry's face changed from a laughing to a grave one. I saw how it was. He had glanced at Adela, and her look of unmistakable disappointment was reflected in his face. But there was a glimmer of pleasure in his eyes, notwithstanding; and I fancied I could see that the pleasure would have been more marked, had he not feared that he had placed himself at a disadvantage with her, namely, that she would suppose him incapable of producing a story. However, it was only for a moment that this change of feeling stopped him. With a gesture of some haste he re-opened the manuscript, which he had rolled up as if to protect it from the indignation of his brother, and read the following ballad:—

"THE TWO GORDONS.

I.

"There was John Gordon, and Archibold,
And an earl's twin sons were they.
When they were one and twenty years old,
They fell out on their birthday.

" 'Turn,' said Archibold, 'brother sly!
Turn now, false and fell;
Or down thou goest, as black as a lie,
To the father of lies in hell.'

“ ‘Why this to me, brother Archie, I pray?
What ill have I done to thee?’

‘Smooth-faced hound, thou shalt rue the day
Thou gettest an answer of me.

“ ‘For mine will be louder than Lady Janet’s,
And spoken in broad daylight—
And the wall to scale is my iron mail,
Not her castle wall at night.’

“ ‘I clomb the wall of her castle tall,
In the moon and the roaring wind;
It was dark and still in her bower until
The morning looked in behind.’

“ ‘Turn therefore, John Gordon, false brother;
For either thou or I,
On a hard wet bed—wet, cold, and red,
For evermore shall lie.’

“ ‘Oh, Archibold, Janet is my true love;
Would I had told it thee!’
‘I hate thee the worse. Turn, or I’ll curse
The night that got thee and me.’

“ ‘Their swords they drew, and the sparks they flew,
As if hammers did anvils beat;
And the red blood ran, till the ground began
To plash beneath their feet.

“ ‘Oh, Archie! thou hast given me a cold supper,
A supper of steel, I trow;
But reach me one grasp of a brother’s hand,
And turn me, before you go.’

“ ‘But he turned himself on his gold-spurred heel,
And away, with a speechless frown;
And up in the oak, with a greedy croak,
The carrion-crow claimed his own.

II.

- “The sun looked over a cloud of gold ;
Lady Margaret looked over the wall.
Over the bridge rode Archibold ;
Behind him his merry men all.
- “He leads his band to the holy land.
They follow with merry din.
A white Christ’s cross is on his back ;
In his breast a darksome sin.
- “And the white cross burned him like the fire,
That he could nor eat nor rest ;
It burned in and in, to get at the sin,
That lay cowering in his breast.
- “A mile from the shore of the Dead Sea,
The army lay one night.
Lord Archibold rose ; and out he goes,
Walking in the moonlight.
- “He came to the shore of the old salt sea—
Yellow sands with frost-like tinge ;
The bones of the dead on the edge of its bed,
Lay lapped in its oozy fringe.
- “He sat him down on a half-sunk stone,
And he sighed so dreary and deep :
‘The devil may take my soul when I wake,
If he’d only let me sleep !’
- “Out from the bones and the slime and the stones,
Came a voice like a raven’s croak :
‘Was it thou Lord Archibold Gordon ?’ it said,
‘Was it thou those words that spoke ?’
- “‘I’ll say them again,’ quoth Archibold,
‘Be thou ghost or fiend of the deep.’
‘Lord Archibold heed how thou may’st speed,
If thou sell me thy soul for sleep.’

- “ Lord Archibold laughed with a loud *ha! ha!*—
The Dead Sea curdled to hear :
‘ Thou would’st have the worst of the bargain curst—
It has every fault but fear.’
- “ ‘ Done, Lord Archibold?’ ‘ Lord Belzebub, done!’
His laugh came back in a moan.
The salt glittered on, and the white moon shone,
And Lord Archibold was alone.
- “ And back he went to his glimmering tent;
And down in his cloak he lay;
And sound he slept; and a pale-faced man
Watched by his bed till day.
- “ And if ever he turned or moaned in his sleep,
Or his brow began to lower,
Oh! gentle and clear, in the sleeper’s ear,
He would whisper words of power;
- “ Till his lips would quiver, and sighs of bliss
From sorrow’s bosom would break;
And the tear, soft and slow, would gather and flow;
And yet he would not wake.
- “ Every night the pale-faced man
Sat by his bed, I say;
And in mail rust-brown, with his visor down,
Rode beside him in battle-fray.
- “ But well I wot that it was not
The devil that took his part;
But his twin-brother John, he thought dead and gone,
Who followed to ease his heart.

III.

- “ Home came Lord Archibold, weary wight,
Home to his own countree!
And he cried, when his castle came in sight,
‘ Now Christ me save and see!’

“ And the man in rust-brown, with his visor down,
Had gone, he knew not where.
And he lighted down, and into the hall,
And his mother met him there.

“ But dull was her eye, though her mien was high ;
And she spoke like Eve to Cain :
‘ Lord Archibold Gordon, answer me true,
Or I’ll never speak again.

“ ‘ Where is thy brother, Lord Archibold ?
He was flesh and blood of thine.
Has thy brother’s keeper laid him cold,
Where the warm sun cannot shine ? ’

“ Lord Archibold could not speak a word,
For his heart was almost broke.
He turned to go. The carrion crow
At the window gave a croak.

“ ‘ Now where art thou going, Lord Archie ? ’ she said,
‘ With thy lips so white and thin ? ’
‘ Mother, good-bye ; I am going to lie
In the earth with my brother-twin.’

“ Lady Margaret sank on her couch. ‘ Alas !
I shall lose them both to-day.’
Lord Archibold strode along the road,
To the field of the Brothers’ Fray.

“ He came to the spot where they had fought.
‘ My God ! ’ he cried in fright,
‘ They have left him there, till his bones are bare ;
Through the plates they glimmer white.’

“ For his brother’s armour lay there, dank,
And worn with frost and dew.
Had the long, long grass that grew so rank,
Grown the very armour through ?

“ ‘O brother, brother !’ cried the Earl,
With a loud, heart-broken wail,
‘I would put my soul into thy bones,
To see thee alive and hale.’

“ ‘Ha ! ha !’ said a voice from out the helm—
’Twas the voice of the Dead Sea shore—
And the joints did close, and the armour rose,
And clattered and grass upore—

“ ‘Thou canst put no soul into his bones,
Thy brother alive to set ;
For the sleep was thine, and thy soul is mine,
And, Lord Archibold, well-met !’

“ ‘Two words to that !’ said the fearless Earl ;
‘The sleep was none of thine ;
For I dreamed of my brother all the night—
His soul brought the sleep to mine.

“ ‘But I care not a crack for a soul so black,
And thou may’s’t have it yet :
I would let it burn to eternity,
My brother alive to set.’

“ The demon lifted his beaver up,
Crusted with blood and mould ;
And, lo ! John Gordon looked out of the helm
And smiled upon Archibold.

“ ‘Thy soul is mine, brother Archie,’ he said,
‘And I yield it thee none the worse ;
No devil came near thee, Archie, lad,
But a brother to be thy nurse.’

“ Lord Archibold fell upon his knee,
On the blood-fed, bright green sod :
‘The soul that my brother gives back to me,
Is thine for ever, O God !’ ”

“Now for a piece of good, honest prose!” said the curate, the moment Harry had finished, without allowing room for any remarks. “That is, if the ladies and gentlemen will allow me to read once more.”

Of course, all assented heartily.

“It is nothing of a story, but I think it is something of a picture, drawn principally from experiences of my own childhood, which I told you was spent chiefly in the north of Scotland. The one great joy of the year, although some years went without it altogether, was the summer visit paid to the shores of the Moray Firth. My story is merely a record of some of the impressions left on myself by such a visit, although the boy is certainly not a portrait of myself; and if it has no result, no end, reaching beyond childhood into what is commonly called life, I presume it is not of a peculiar or solitary character in that respect; for surely many that we count finished stories—life-histories—must look very different to the angels; and if they haven’t to be written over again, at least, they have to be carried on a few æons further.

“A CHILD’S HOLIDAY.

“Before the door of a substantial farmhouse in the north of Scotland, stands a vehicle of somewhat singular construction. When analyzed, however, its composition proves to be simple enough. It is a common agricultural cart, over which, by means of a few iron rods bent across, a semi-cylindrical covering of white canvas has been stretched. It is thus transformed from a hay or harvest cart into a family carriage, of comfortable dimensions, though somewhat slow of progress. The lack of springs is supplied by thick layers of straw, while sacks stuffed with the same material are placed around for seats. Various articles are being stowed away under the bags, and in

the corners among the straw, by children with bright expectant faces; the said articles having been in process of collection and arrangement for a month or six weeks previous, in anticipation of the journey which now lies, in all its length and brightness, the length and brightness of a long northern summer's day, before them.

“At last, all their private mysteries of provisions, playthings, and books, having found places of safety more or less accessible on demand, every motion of the horse, every shake and rattle of the covered cart, makes them only more impatient to proceed; which desire is at length gratified by their moving on at a funeral pace through the open gate. They are followed by another cart loaded with the luggage necessary for a six weeks' sojourn at one of the fishing villages on the coast, about twenty miles distant from their home. Their father and mother are to follow in the gig, at a later hour in the day, expecting to overtake them about half-way on the road.—Through the neighbouring village they pass, out upon the lonely highway.

“Some seeds are borne to the place of their destiny by their own wings and the wings of the wind, some by the wings of birds, some by simple gravitation. The seed of my story, namely, the covered cart, sent forth to find the soil for its coming growth, is dragged by a stout horse to the sea-shore; and as it oscillates from side to side like a balloon trying to walk, I shall say something of its internal constitution, and principally of its germ; for, regarded as the seed of my story, a pale boy of thirteen is the germ of the cart. First, though he will be of little use to us afterwards, comes a great strong boy of sixteen, who considerably despises this mode of locomotion, believing himself quite capable of driving his mother in the gig, whereas he is only destined to occupy her place in the evening, and return with his father. Then comes the said

germ, a boy whom repeated attacks of illness have blanched, and who looks as if the thinness of its earthly garment made his soul tremble with the proximity of the ungenial world. Then follows a pretty blonde, with smooth hair, and smooth cheeks, and bright blue eyes, the embodiment of home pleasures and love; whose chief enjoyment, and earthly destiny indeed, so far as yet revealed, consist in administering to the cupidities of her younger brother, a very ogre of gingerbread men, and Silenus of bottled milk. This milk, by the way, is expected, from former experience, to afford considerable pleasure at the close of the journey, in the shape of one or two pellets of butter in each bottle; the novelty of the phenomenon, and not any scarcity of the article, constituting the ground of interest. A baby on the lap of a rosy country girl, and the servant in his blue Sunday coat, who sits outside the cover on the edge of the cart, but looks in occasionally to show some attention to the young woman, complete the contents of the vehicle.

“Herbert Netherby, though, as I have said, only thirteen years of age, had already attained a degree of mental development sufficient for characterization. Disease had favoured the almost unhealthy predominance of the mental over the bodily powers of the child; so that, although the constitution which at one time was supposed to have entirely given way, had for the last few years been gradually gaining strength, he was still to be seen far oftener walking about with his hands in his pockets, and his gaze bent on the ground, or turned up to the clouds, than joining in any of the boyish sports of those of his own age. A nervous dread of ridicule would deter him from taking his part, even when for a moment the fountain of youthfulness gushed forth, and impelled him to find rest in activity. So the impulse would pass away, and he would relapse into his former quiescence. But this partial isolation ministered to the

growth of a love of Nature which, although its roots were coeval with his being, might not have so soon appeared above ground, but for this lack of human companionship. Thus the boy became one of Nature's favourites, and enjoyed more than a common share of her teaching.

"But he loved her most in her stranger moods. The gathering of a blue cloud, on a sultry summer afternoon, he watched with intense hope, in expectation of a thunder-storm; and a windy night, after harvest, when the trees moaned and tossed their arms about, and the wind ran hither and thither over the desolate fields of stubble, made the child's heart dance within him, and sent him out careering through the deepening darkness. To meet him then, you would not have known him for the sedate, actionless boy, whom you had seen in the morning looking listlessly on while his schoolfellows played. But of all his loves for the shows of Nature, none was so strong as his love for water—common to childhood, with its mills of rushes, its dams, its bridges, its aqueducts; only in Herbert, it was more a quiet, delighted contemplation. Weakness prevented his joining his companions in the river; but the sight of their motions in the mystery of the water, as they floated half-idealized in the clear depth, or glided along by graceful propulsion, gave him as much real enjoyment as they received themselves. For it was water itself that delighted him, whether in rest or motion; whether rippling over many stones, like the first half-articulate sounds of a child's speech, mingled with a strange musical tremble and cadence which the heart only, and not the ear, could detect; or lying in deep still pools, from the bottom of which gleamed up bright green stones, or yet brighter water-plants, cool in their little grotto, with water for an atmosphere and a firmament, through which the sun-rays came, washed of their burning heat, but undimmed of their splendour. He would lie for an hour by the side of a

hill-streamlet ; he would stand gazing into a muddy pool, left on the road by last night's rain. Once, in such a brown-yellow pool, he beheld a glory—the sun, encircled with a halo vast and wide, varied like the ring of opal colours seen about the moon when she floats through white clouds, only larger and brighter than that. Looking up, he could see nothing but a chaos of black clouds, brilliant towards the sun: the colours he could not see, except in the muddy water.

“In autumn the rains would come down for days, and the river grow stormy, forget its clearness, and spread out like a lake over the meadows ; and that was delightful indeed. But greater yet was the delight when the foot-bridge was carried away ; for then they had to cross the stream in a boat. He longed for water where it could not be ; would fain have seen it running through the grass in front of his father's house ; and had a waking vision of a stream with wooden shores that babbled through his bedroom. So it may be fancied with what delight he overheard the parental decision that they should spend some weeks by the shores of the great world-water, the father and the grave of rivers.

“After many vain outlooks, and fruitless inquiries of their driver, a sudden turn in the road brought them in sight of the sea between the hills ; itself resembling a low blue hill, covered with white stones. Indeed, the little girl only doubted whether those were white stones or sheep scattered all over it. They lost sight of it ; saw it again ; and hailed it with greater rapture than at first.

“The sun was more than half-way down when they arrived. They had secured a little cottage, almost on the brow of the high shore, which in most places went down perpendicularly to the beach or sands, and in some right into deep water ; but opposite the cottage, declined with a sloping, grassy descent. A winding track led down to the village, which nestled in a

hollow, with steep footpaths radiating from it. In front of it, lower still, lay the narrow beach, narrow even at low water, for the steep, rocky shore went steep and rocky down into the abyss. A thousand fantastic rocks stood between land and water; amidst which, at half-tide, were many little rocky harbours, with floors of sunny sand, and three or four feet of water. Here you might bathe, or sit on the ledges with your feet in the water, medicated with the restless glitter and bewilderment of a half-dissolved sunbeam.

"A promontory, curving out into the sea, on the right, formed a bay and natural harbour, from which, towards the setting sun, many fishing-boats were diverging into the wide sea, as the children, stiff and weary, were getting out of the cart. Herbert's fatigue was soon forgotten in watching their brown-dyed sails, glowing almost red in the sunset, as they went out far into the dark, hunters of the deep, to spend the night on the waters.

"From the windows, the children could not see the shore, with all its burst of beauties struck out from the meeting of things unlike; for it lay far down, and the brow of the hill rose between it and them; only they knew that below the waves were breaking on the rocks, and they heard the gush and roar filling all the air. The room in which Herbert slept was a little attic, with a window towards the sea. After gazing with unutterable delight on the boundless water, which lay like a condensed sky in the grey light of the sleeping day (for there is no night at this season in the North), till he saw it even when his eyelids closed from weariness, he lay down, and the monotonous lullaby of the sea mingled with his dreams.

"Next morning he was wakened by the challenging and replying of the sentinel-cocks, whose crowing sounded to him more clear and musical than that of any of the cocks at home.

He jumped out of bed. It was a sunny morning, and his soul felt like a flake of sunshine, as he looked out of his window on the radiant sea, green and flashing, its clear surface here and there torn by the wind into spots of opaque white. So happy did he feel, that he might have been one who had slept through death and the judgment, and had awaked, a child, still in the kingdom of God, under the new heavens and upon the new earth.

“After breakfast, they all went down with their mother to the sea-shore. As they went, the last of the boats which had gone out the night before, were returning laden, like bees. The sea had been bountiful. Everything shone with gladness. But as Herbert drew nearer, he felt a kind of dread at the recklessness of the waves. On they hurried, assailed the rocks, devoured the sands, cast themselves in wild abandonment on whatever opposed them. He feared at first to go near, for they were unsympathizing, caring not for his love or his joy, and would sweep him away like one of those floating sea-weeds. ‘If they are such in their play,’ thought he, ‘what must they be in their anger!’ But ere long he was playing with the sea as with a tame tiger, chasing the retreating waters till they rallied and he, in his turn, had to flee from their pursuit. Wearied at length, he left his brother and sister building castles of wet sand, and wandered alone along the shore.

“Everywhere about lay shallow lakes of salt water, so shallow that they were invisible, except when a puff of wind blew a thousand ripples into the sun; whereupon they flashed as if a precipitous rain of stormy light had rushed down upon them. Lifting his eyes from one of these films of water, Herbert saw on the opposite side, stooping to pick up some treasure of the sea, a little girl, apparently about nine years of age. When she raised herself and saw Herbert, she moved slowly away

with a quiet grace, that strangely contrasted with her tattered garments. She was ragged like the sea-shore, or the bunch of dripping sea-weed that she carried in her hand ; she was bare from foot to knee, and passed over the wet sand with a gleam ; the wind had been at more trouble with her hair than any loving hand ; it was black, lustreless, and tangled. The sight of rags was always enough to move Herbert's sympathies, and he wished to speak to the little girl, and give her something. But when he had followed her a short distance, all at once, and without having looked round, she began to glide away from him with a wave-like motion, dancing and leaping ; till a clear pool in the hollow of a tabular rock imbedded in the sand, arrested her progress. Here she stood like a statue, gazing into its depth ; then, with a dart like a kingfisher, plunged half into it, caught something, at which her head and curved neck showed that she looked with satisfaction—and again, before Herbert could come near her, was skimming along the uneven shore. He followed, as a boy follows a lapwing ; but she, like the lapwing, gradually increased the distance between them, till he gave up the pursuit with some disappointment, and returned to his brother and sister. More ambitious than they, he proceeded to construct—chiefly for the sake of the moat he intended to draw around it—a sand-castle of considerable pretensions ; but the advancing tide drove him from his stronghold before he had begun to dig the projected fosse.

“ As they returned home, they passed a group of fishermen in their long boots and flapped sou'-westers, looking somewhat anxiously seaward. Much to Herbert's delight, they predicted a stiff gale, and probably a storm. A low bank of cloud had gathered along the horizon, and the wind had already freshened ; the white spots were thicker on the waves, and the sound of their trampling on the shore grew louder.

“ After dinner, they sat at the window of their little parlour, looking out over the sea, which grew darker and more sullen, ever as the afternoon declined. The cloudy bank had risen and walled out the sun ; but a narrow space of blue on the horizon looked like the rent whence the wind rushed forth on the sea, and with the feet of its stormy horses tore up the blue surface, and scattered the ocean-dust in clouds. As evening drew on, Herbert could keep in the house no longer. He wandered away on the heights, keeping from the brow of the cliffs ; now and then stooping and struggling with a stormier eddy ; till, descending into a little hollow, he sunk below the plane of the tempest, and stood in the glow of a sudden calm, hearing the tumult all round him, but himself in peace. Looking up, he could see nothing but the sides of the hollow with the sky resting on them, till, turning towards the sea, he saw, at some distance, a point of the cliff rising abruptly into the air. At the same moment, the sun looked out from a crack in the clouds, on the very horizon ; and as Herbert could not see the sunset, the peculiar radiance illuminated the more strangely the dark vault of earth and cloudy sky. Suddenly, to his astonishment, it was concentrated on the form of the little ragged girl. She stood on the summit of the peak before him. The light was a crown, not to her head only, but to her whole person ; as if she herself were the crown set on the brows of the majestic shore. Disappearing as suddenly, it left her standing on the peak, dark and stormy ; every tress, if tresses they could be called, of her windy hair, every tatter of her scanty garments, seeming individually to protest, ‘ The wind is my playmate ; let me go ! ’ If Aphrodite was born of the sunny sea, this child was the offspring of the windy shore ; as if the mind of the place had developed for itself a consciousness, and this was its embodiment. She bore a strange affinity to the rocks, and the sea-weed, and the pools, and

the wide, wild ocean ; and Herbert would scarcely have been shocked to see her cast herself from the cliff into the waves, which now dashed half-way up its height. By the time he had got out of the hollow, she had vanished, and where she had gone he could not conjecture. He half feared she had fallen over the precipice ; and several times that night, as the vapour of dreams gathered around him, he started from his half-sleep in terror at seeing the little genius of the storm fall from her rock-pedestal into the thundering waves at its foot.

“Next day the wind continuing off the sea, with vapour and rain, the children were compelled to remain within doors, and betake themselves to books and playthings. But Herbert’s chief resource lay in watching the sea and the low grey sky, between which was no distinguishable horizon. The wind still increased, and before the afternoon it blew a thorough storm, wind and waves raging together on the rocky shore. The fishermen had secured their boats, drawing them up high on the land ; but what vessels might be labouring under the low misty pall no one could tell. Many anxious fears were expressed for some known to be at sea ; and many tales of shipwreck were told that night in the storm-shaken cottages.

“The day was closing in, darkened the sooner by the mist, when Herbert, standing at the window, now rather weary, saw the little girl dart past like a petrel. He snatched up his cap and rushed from the house, buttoning his jacket to defend him from the weather. The little fellow, though so quiet among other boys, was a lover of the storm as much as the girl was, and would have preferred its buffeting, so long as his strength lasted, to the warmest nook by the fireside ; and now he could not resist the temptation to follow her. As soon as he was clear of the garden, he saw her stopping to gaze down on the sea—starting again along the heights—blown out of her course—and regaining it by struggling up

in the teeth of the storm. He at once hastened in pursuit, trying as much as possible to keep out of her sight, and was gradually lessening the distance between them, when, on crossing the hollow already mentioned, he saw her on the edge of the cliff, close to the pinnacle on which she had stood the night before ; where after standing for a moment, she sank downwards and vanished, but whether into earth or air, he could not tell. He approached the place. A blast of more than ordinary violence fought against him, as if determined to preserve the secret of its favourite's refuge. But he persisted, and gained the spot.

“He then found that the real edge of the precipice was several yards farther off, the ground sloping away from where he stood. At his feet, in the slope, was an almost perpendicular opening. He hesitated a little ; but, sure that the child was a real human child and no phantom, he did not hesitate long. He entered, and found it lead spirally downwards. Descending with some difficulty, for the passage was narrow, he arrived at a small chamber, into one corner of which the stone shaft, containing the stair, projected half its round. The chamber looked as if it had been hollowed out of the rock. A narrow window, little more than a loop-hole through the thick wall, admitted the roar of the waves and a dim grey light. This light was just sufficient to show him the child in the farthest corner of the chamber, bending forward with her hands between her knees, in a posture that indicated fear. The little playfellow of the winds was not sure of him. At the first word he spoke, a sea-bird, which had made its home in the apartment, startled by the sound of his voice, dashed through the window, with a sudden clang of wings, into the great misty void without ; and Herbert looking out after it, almost forgot the presence of the little girl in the awe and delight of the spectacle before him. It was now much darker, and the fog had settled down more

closely on the face of the deep; but just below him he could see the surface of the ocean, whose mad waves appeared to rush bellowing out of the unseen on to the shore of the visible. When, after some effort, he succeeded in leaning out of the window, he could see the shore beneath him; for he was on its extreme verge, and the spray now and then dashed through the loop-hole into the chamber. He was still gazing and absorbed, when a sweet timid voice, that yet partook undeniably of the wildness of a sea-breeze, startled him out of his contemplation.

“‘Did my mother send you to me?’ said the voice.

“He looked down. Close beside him stood the child, gazing earnestly up into his face through the twilight from the window.

“‘Where does your mother live?’ asked Herbert.

“‘All out there,’ the child answered, pointing to the window.

“While he was thinking what she could mean, she continued:—

“‘Mother is angry to-night; but when the sun comes out, and those nasty clouds are driven away, she will laugh again. Mother does not like black clouds and fogs; they spoil her house.’

“Still perplexed as to the child’s meaning, Herbert asked,—

“‘Does your mother love you?’

“‘Yes, except when she is angry. She does not love me to-night; but to-morrow, perhaps, she will be all over laughs to me; and that makes me run to her; and she will smile to me all day, till night comes and she goes to sleep, and leaves me alone; for I hear her sleeping, but I cannot go to sleep with her.’”

Here the curate interrupted his reading to remark, that he

feared he had spoiled the pathos of the child's words, by translating them into English ; but that they must gain more, for the occasion, by being made intelligible to his audience, than they could lose by the change from their original form.

"Herbert's sympathies had by this time made him suspect that the child must be talking of the sea, which somehow she had come to regard as her mother. He asked,—

" ' Where does your father live, then ? ' "

" ' I have not any father,' she answered. ' I had one, but mother took him.' "

"Several other questions Herbert put ; but still the child's notions ran in the same channel. They were wild notions, but uttered with confidence, as if they were the most ordinary facts. It seemed that whatever her imagination suggested, bore to her the impress of self-evident truth ; and that she knew no higher reality.

"By this time it was almost dark.

" ' I must go home,' said Herbert.

" ' I will go with you,' responded the girl.

"She ran along beside him, but in the discursive manner natural to her ; till, coming to one of the paths descending towards the shore, she darted down, without saying good-night even.

"Next day, the storm having abated, and the sun shining out, they were standing on the beach, near a fisherman, who like them was gazing seawards, when the child went skimming past along the shore. Mrs. Netherby asked the fishermen about her, and learned the secret of the sea's motherhood. She had been washed ashore from the wreck of a vessel ; and was found on the beach, tied to a spar. All besides had perished. From the fragment they judged it to have been a Dutch vessel. Some one had said in her hearing—' Poor

child ! the sea is her mother ; ' and her imagination had cherished the idea. A fisherman, who had no family, had taken her to his house and loved her dearly. But he lost his wife shortly after ; and a year or two ago, the sea had taken him, the only father she knew. All, however, were kind to her. She was welcome wherever she chose to go and share with the family. But no one knew to-day where she would be to-morrow, where she would have her next meal, or where she would sleep. She was wild, impulsive, affectionate. The simple people of the village believed her to be of foreign birth and high descent, while reverence for her lonely condition made them treat her with affection as well as deference ; so that the forsaken child, regarded as subject to no law, was as happy in her freedom and confidence as any wild winged thing of the land or sea. The summer loved her ; the winter strengthened her. Her first baptism in the salt waters had made her a free creature of the earth and skies ; had fortified her, Achilles-like, against all hardship, cold, and nakedness to come ; had delivered her from the bonds of habit and custom, and shown in her what earth and air of themselves can do, to make the lowest, most undeveloped life, a divine gift.

"The following morning, the sea was smooth and clear. So was the sky. Looking down from their cottage, the sea appeared to Herbert to slope steeply up to the horizon, so that the shore lay like a deep narrow valley between him and it. Far down, at the low pier, he saw a little boat belonging to a retired ship-captain. The oars were on board ; and the owner and some one with him were walking towards the boat. Now the captain had promised to take him with him some day.

"He was half-way down the road a moment after the words of permission had left his mother's lips, and was waiting at the boat when the two men came up. They readily agreed to let

him go with them. They were going to row to a village on the opposite side of the bay, and return in the evening. Herbert was speechless with delight. They got in, the boat heaving beneath them, unmoored and pushed off. This suspension between sea and sky was a new sensation to Herbert ; for when he looked down, his eye did not repose on the surface, but penetrated far into a clear green abyss, where the power of vision seemed rather to vanish than be arrested. When he looked up, the shore was behind them ; and he knew, for the first time, what it was to look at the land as he had looked at the sea ; to regard the land, in its turn, as a *phenomenon*—observing it apart from himself.

“ Running along the shore like a little bird, he saw the child of the sea ; and, further to the right, the peak on which she had stood in the sunset, and into whose mysterious chamber she had led him. The captain here put a pocket-telescope into his hand ; and with this annihilator of space he made new discoveries. He saw a little window in the cliff, doubtless the same from which he had looked out on the dim sea ; and then perceived that the front of the cliff, in that part, was no rock, but a wall, regularly and strongly built. It was evidently the remains of an old fortress. The front foundation had been laid in the rocks of the shore ; the cliff had then been faced up with masonry ; and behind chambers had been cut in the rock ; into one of which Herbert had descended a ruined spiral stair. The castle itself, which had stood on the top, had mouldered away, leaving only a rugged and broken surface.

“ By this time they were near the opposite shore, and Herbert looked up with dread at the great cliffs that rose perpendicularly out of the water, which heaved slowly and heavily, with an appearance of immense depth, against them. Their black jagged sides had huge holes, into which the sea

rushed—far into the dark—with a muffled roar ; and large protuberances of rock, bare and threatening. Numberless shadows lay on their faces ; and here and there from their tops trickled little streams, plashing into the waves at their feet. Passing through a natural arch in a rock, lofty and narrow, called the Devil's Bridge, and turning a little promontory, they were soon aground on the beach.

“When the captain had finished his business, they had some dinner at the inn ; and while the two men drank their grog, Herbert was a delighted listener to many a sea story, old and new. How the boy longed to be a sailor, and live always on the great waters ! The blocks and cordage of the fast-rooted flagstaff before the inn, assumed an almost magic interest to him, as the two sailors went on with their tales of winds and rocks, and narrow escapes and shipwrecks. And how proud he was of the friendship of these old seafarers !

“At length it was time to return home. As they rowed slowly along, the sun was going down in the west, and their shadows were flung far on the waves, which gleamed and glistened in the rich calm light. Land and sea were bathed in the blessing of heaven ; its glory was on the rocks, and on the shore, and in the depth of the heaving sea. Under the boat, wherever it went, shone a paler green. The only sounds were of the oars in the row-locks, of the drip from their blades as they rose and made curves in the air, and the low plash with which they dipped again into the sea ; while the water in the wake of the boat hastened to compose itself again to that sleep from which it had been unwillingly roused by the passing keel. The boy's heart was full. Often in after years he longed for the wings of a dove that he might fly to that boat (still floating in the calm sea of his memory), and there lie until his spirit had had rest enough.

“The next time that Herbert approached the little girl, she waited his coming ; and while they talked, Mrs. Netherby joined them with her Effie. Presently the gaze of the sea-child was fixed upon little Effie, to the all but total neglect of the others. The result of this contemplation was visible the next day. Mrs. Netherby having invited her to come and see them, the following morning, as they were seated at breakfast, the door of the room opened, without any prefatory tap, and in peeped with wild confidence the smiling face of the untamed Undine. It was at once evident that civilization had laid a finger upon her, and that a new womanly impulse had been awakened. For there she stood, gazing at Effie, and with both hands smoothing down her own hair, which she had managed, after a fashion, to part in the middle, and had plentifully wetted with sea-water. In her run up the height, it had begun to dry, and little spangles of salt were visible all over it. She could not alter her dress, whose many slashes showed little lining except her skin ; but she had done all she could to approximate her appearance to that of Effie, whom she seemed to regard as a little divinity.

“Mrs. Netherby’s heart was drawn towards the motherless child, and she clothed her from head to foot ; though how far this was a benefit as regarded cold and heat, is a question. Herbert began to teach her to read ; in which her progress was just like her bodily movements over the earth’s surface ; now a dead pause, and now the flight of a bird. Now and then she would suddenly start up, heedless where her book might happen to fall, and rush out along the heights ; returning next day, or the same afternoon, and, without any apology, resuming her studies.

“This holiday was to Herbert one of those seasons which tinge the whole of the future life. It was a storehouse of sights and sounds and images of thought ; a tiring-room,

wherein to clothe the ideas that came forth to act their parts upon the stage of reason. Often at night, just ere the sleep that wipes out the day from the overfilled and blotted tablets of the brain, enwrapped him in its cool, grave-like garments, a vision of the darkened sea, spotted and spangled with pools of unutterable light, would rise before him unbidden, in that infinite space for creation which lies dark and waiting under the closed eyelids. The darkened sea might be but the out-thrown image of his own overshadowed soul ; and the spots of light the visual form of his hopes. So clearly would these be present to him sometimes, that when he opened his eyes and gazed into the darkness of his room, he would see the bright spaces shining before him still. Then he would fall asleep and dream on about the sea—watching a little cutter perhaps, as ‘she leaned to the lee, and girdled the wave,’ flinging the frolicsome waters from her bows, and parting a path for herself between. Or he would be seated with the helm in his hand, and all the force and the joy wherewith she dashed headlong on the rising waves, and half pierced them and half drove them under her triumphant keel, would be issuing from his will and his triumph.

“Surely even for the sad despairing waves there is some hope, out in that boundless room which borders on the sky, and upon which, even in the gloomiest hour of tempest, falls sometimes from heaven a glory intense.

“So when the time came that the lover of waters must return, he went back enriched with new visions of them in their great home and motherland. He had seen them still and silent as a soul in holy trance ; he had seen them raving in a fury of livid green, swarming with ‘white-mouthed waves ;’ he had seen them lying in one narrow ridge of unbroken blue, where the eye, finding no marks to measure the distance withal, saw miles as furlongs ; and he had seen sweeps and shadows

innumerable stretched along its calm expanse, so dividing it into regions, and graduating the distance, that the eye seemed to wander on and on from sea to sea, and the ships to float in oceans beyond oceans of infinite reach. O lonely space! awful indeed wert thou, did no one love us! But he had yet to receive one more vision of the waters, and that was to be in a dream. With this dream I will close the story of his holiday; for it went with him ever after, breaking forth from the dream-home, and encompassing his waking thoughts with an atmosphere of courage and hope, when his heart was ready to sink in a world which was not the world the boy had thought to enter, when he ran to welcome his fate.

“On their last Sunday, Herbert went with his mother to the evening service in a little chapel in the midst of the fishermen’s cottages. It was a curious little place, with galleries round, that nearly met in the middle, and a high pulpit with a great sounding-board over it, from which came the voice of an earnest little Methodist, magnified by his position into a mighty prophet. The good man was preaching on the parable of *the sheep and the goats*; and, in his earnestness for his own theology and the souls of his hearers, was not content that the Lord should say these things in his own way, but he must say them in his too. And a terrible utterance it was! Looking about, unconsciously seeking some relief from the accumulation of horrors with which the preacher was threatening the goats of his congregation, Herbert spied, in the very front of one of the side galleries, his little pupil, white with terror, and staring with round unwinking eyes full in the face of the prophet of fear. Never after could he read the parable without seeing the blanched face of the child, and feeling a renewal of that evening’s sadness over the fate of the poor goats which afterwards grew into the question—‘Doth God care for oxen, and not for goats?’ He never saw the child again;

for they left the next day, and she did not come to bid them good-bye.

“As he went home from the chapel, her face of terror haunted him.

“That night he fell asleep, as usual, with the sound of the waves in his soul. And as he slept he dreamed.—He stood, as he thought, upon the cliff, within which lay the remnants of the old castle. The sun was slowly sinking down the western sky, and a great glory lay upon the sea. Close to the shore beneath, by the side of some low rocks, floated a little boat. He thought how delightful it would be to lie in the boat in the sunlight, and let it die away upon his bosom. He scrambled down the rocks, stepped on board, and laid himself in the boat, with his face turned towards the sinking sun. Lower and lower the sun sank, seeming to draw the heavens after him, like a net. At length he plunged beneath the waves; but as his last rays disappeared on the horizon, lo! a new splendour burst upon the astonished boy. The whole waters were illuminated from beneath, with the permeating glories of the buried radiance. In rainbow circles, and intermingling, fluctuating sweeps of colours, the sea lay like an intense opal, molten with the fire of its own hues. The sky gave back the effulgence with a less deep but more heavenly loveliness.

“But betwixt the sea and the sky, just over the grave of the down-gone sun, a dark spot appeared, parting the earth and the heaven where they had mingled in embraces of light. And the dark spot grew and spread, and a cold breath came softly over the face of the shining waters; and the colours paled away; and as the blossom-sea withered and grew grey below, the clouds withered and darkened above. The sea began to swell and moan and look up, like the soul of a man whose joy is going down in darkness; and a horror came over the heart of the sleeper, and in his dream he lifted up his head, meaning

to rise and hasten to his home. But, behold, the shore was far away, and the great castle-cliff had sunk to a low ridge! With a cry, he sank back on the bosom of the careless sea.

"The boat began to rise and fall on the waking waves. Then a great blast of wind laid hold of it, and whirled it about. Once more he looked up, and saw that the tops of the waves were torn away, and that 'the white water was coming out of the black.' Higher and higher rose the billows; louder and louder roared the wind across their jagged furrows, tearing awful descants from their bursting chords, and tossing the little boat like a leaf in the lone desert of storms; now holding it perched on the very crest of a wave, in the mad eye of the tempest, while the chaotic waters danced, raving about, in hopeless confusion; now letting it sink in the hollow of the waves, and lifting above it cold glittering walls of water, that becalmed it as in a sheltered vale, while the hurricane roaring above, flung arches of writhing waters across from billow to billow overhead, and threatened to close, as in a transparent tomb, boat and boy. At length, when the boat rose once more, unwilling, to the awful ridge, jagged and white, a yet fiercer blast tore it from the top of the wave. The dreamer found himself choking in the waters, and soon lost all consciousness of the buffeting waves or the shrieking winds.

"When the dreamer again awoke, he felt that he was carried along through the storm above the waves; for they reached him only in bursts of spray, though the wind raged around him more fiercely than ever. He opened his eyes and looked downwards. Beneath him seethed and boiled the tumultuous billows, their wreathy tops torn from them, and shot, in long vanishing sheets of spray, over the distracted wilderness. Such was the turmoil beneath, that he had to close his eyes again to feel that he was moving onwards.

"The next time he opened them, it was to look up. And lo!

a shadowy face bent over him, whence love unutterable was falling in floods, from eyes deep, and dark, and still, as the heavens that are above the clouds. Great waves of hair streamed back from a noble head, and floated on the tides of the tempest. The face was like his mother's and like his father's, and like a face that he had seen somewhere in a picture, but far more beautiful and strong and loving than all. With a sudden glory of gladness, in which the spouting pinnales of the fathomless pyramids of wandering waters dwindled into the confusion of a few troubled water-drops, he knew, he knew that the Lord was carrying his lamb in his bosom. Around him were the everlasting arms, and above him the lamps that light heaven and earth, the eyes that watch and are not weary. And now he felt the arms in which he lay, and he nestled close to that true, wise bosom, which has room in it for all, and where none will strive.

“Over the waters went the Master, now crossing the calm hollows, now climbing the rising wave, now shrouded in the upper ocean of drifting spray, that wrapped him around with whirling force, and anon calmly descending the gliding slope into the glassy trough below. Sometimes, when he looked up, the dreamer could see nothing but the clouds driving across the heavens, whence now and then a star, in a little well of blue, looked down upon him; but anon he knew that the driving clouds were his drifting hair, and that the stars in the blue wells of heaven were his love-lighted eyes. Over the sea he strode, and the floods lifted up their heads in vain. The billows would gather and burst around and over them; but a moment more, and the billows were beneath his feet, and on they were going, safe and sure.

“Long time the journey endured; and the dream faded and again revived. It was as if he had slept, and again awaked; for he lay in soft grass on a mountain-side, and the

form of a mighty man lay outstretched beside him, who was weary with a great weariness. Below, the sea howled and beat against the base of the mountain; but it was far below. Again the Lord arose, and lifted him up, and bore him onwards. Up to the mountain-top they went, through the keen, cold air, and over the fields of snow and ice. On the peak the Master paused and looked down.

“In a vast amphitheatre below, was gathered a multitude that no man could number. They crowded on all sides beyond the reach of the sight, rising up the slopes of the surrounding mountains, till they could no longer be distinguished; grouped and massed upon height above height; filling the hollows, and plains, and platforms all about. But every eye looked towards the lowest centre of the mountain-amphitheatre, where a little vacant spot awaited the presence of some form, which should be the heart of all the throng. Down towards this centre the Lord bore him. Entering the holy circle, he set him gently down, and then looked all around, as if searching earnestly for some one he could not see.

“And not finding whom he sought, he walked across the open space. A path was instantly divided for him through the dense multitude surrounding it. Along this lane of men and women and children, he went; and Herbert ran, following close at his feet; for now all the universe seemed empty save where he was. And he was not rebuked, but suffered to follow. And although the Lord walked fast and far, the feet following him were not weary, but grew in speed and in power. Through the great crowd and beyond it, never looking back, up and over the brow of the mountain they went, and leaving behind them the gathered universe of men, descended into a pale night. Hither and thither went the Master, searching up and down the gloomy valley; now look-

ing behind a great rock, and now through a thicket of brushwood; now entering a dark cave, and now ascending a height and gazing all around; till at last, on a bare plain, seated on a grey stone, with her hands in her lap, they found the little orphan child who had called the sea her mother.

"As he drew near to her, the Lord called out, 'My poor little lamb, I have found you at last!' But she did not seem to hear or understand what he said; for she fell on her knees, and held up her clasped hands, and cried, 'Do not be angry with me. I am a goat; and I ran away because I was afraid. Do not burn me.' But all the answer the Lord made was to stoop, and lift her, and hold her to his breast. And she was an orphan no more.

"So he turned and went back over hill and over dale, and Herbert followed, rejoicing that the lost lamb was found.

"As he followed, he spied in a crevice of a rock, close by his path, a lovely primrose. He stooped to pluck it. And ere he began again to follow, a cock crew shrill and loud; and he knew it was the cock that rebuked Peter; and he trembled and stood up. The Master had vanished. He, too, fell a-weeping bitterly. And again the cock crew; and he opened his eyes, and knew that he had dreamed. His mother stood by his bedside, comforting the weeper with kisses. And he cried to her,—

"'Oh mother! surely he would not come over the sea to find me in the storm, and then leave me because I stopped to pluck a flower!'"

"Too long, I am afraid," said the curate, the moment he had finished his paper, looking at his watch.

"We have not thought so, I am sure," said Adela, courteously.

The ladies rose to go.

"Who is to read next?" said the schoolmaster.

"Why, of course," said the curate, indignantly, "it ought to be my brother, but there is no depending on him."

"If this frost lasts, I will positively read next time," said the doctor. "But, you know, Ralph, it will be better for you to bring something else with you, lest I should fail again."

"Cool!" said the curate. "I think it is time we dropped it,"

"No, please don't," said Harry, with a little anxiety in his tone. "I really want to read my story."

"It looks like it, doesn't it?"

"Now, Ralph, a clergyman should never be sarcastic. Be as indignant as you please—but—sarcastic—never. It is very easy for you, who know just what you have to do, and have besides whole volumes in that rickety old desk of yours, to keep such an appointment as this. Mine is produced for the occasion, *bonâ fide*; and I cannot tell what may be required of me from one hour to another."

He went up to Adela.

"I am very sorry to have failed again," he said.

"But you won't next time, will you?"

"I will not, if I can help it."

CHAPTER XVII.

INTERRUPTION.

BUT it was Adela herself who failed next time. I had seen her during the reading draw her shawl about her as if she were cold. She seemed quite well when the friends left, but she had caught a chill; and before the morning she was quite feverish, and unable to leave her bed.

"You see, colonel," said Mrs. Cathcart at breakfast, "that this doctor of yours is doing the child harm instead of good. He has been suppressing instead of curing the complaint; and now she is worse than ever."

"When the devil—" I began to remark in reply.

"Mr. Smith!" exclaimed Mrs. Cathcart.

"Allow me, madam, to finish my sentence before you make up your mind to be shocked.—When the devil goes out of a man, or a woman either, he gives a terrible wrench by way of farewell. Now, as the prophet Job teaches us, all disease is from the devil; and—"

"The prophet Job!—Mr. Smith?"

"Well, the old Arab Scheik, if you like that epithet better."

"Really, Mr. Smith!"

"Well, I don't mind what you call him. I only mean to say that a disease sometimes goes out with a kind of flare, like

a candle—or like the poor life itself. I believe, if this is an intermittent fever—as, from your description, I expect it will prove to be—it will be the best thing for her.”

“Well, we shall see what Dr. Wade will say.”

“Dr. Wade?” I exclaimed.

“Of course, my brother will not think of trusting such a serious case to an inexperienced young man like Mr. Armstrong.”

“It seems to me,” I replied, “that for some time the case has ceased to be a serious one. You must allow that Adela is better.”

“Seemed to be better, Mr. Smith. But it was all excitement, and here is the consequence. I, as far as I have any influence, decidedly object to Mr. Armstrong having anything more to do with the case.”

“Perhaps you are right, Jane,” said the colonel. “I fear you are. But how can I ask Dr. Wade to resume his attendance?”

Always nervous about Adela, his sister-in-law had at length succeeded in frightening him.

“Leave that to me,” she said; “I will manage him.”

“Pooh!” said I, rudely. “He will jump at it. It will be a grand triumph for him. I only want you to mind what you are about. You know Adela does not like Dr. Wade.”

“And she does like *Doctor* Armstrong?” said Mrs. Cathcart, stuffing each word with significance.

“Yes,” I answered, boldly. “Who would not prefer the one to the other?”

But her arrow had struck. The colonel rose, and saying only, “Well, Jane, I leave the affair in your hands,” walked out of the room. I was coward enough to follow him. Had it been of any use, coward as I was, I would have remained.

But Mrs. Cathcart if she had not reckoned without her

host, had, at least, reckoned without her hostess. She wrote instantly to Dr. Wade, in terms of which it is enough to say that they were successful, for they brought the doctor at once. I saw him pass through the hall, looking awfully stiff, important, and condescending. Beeves, who had opened the door to him, gave me a very queer look as he showed him into the drawing-room, ringing, at the same time, for Adela's maid.

Now Mrs. Cathcart had not expected that the doctor would arrive so soon, and had, as yet, been unable to make up her mind how to communicate to the patient the news of the change in the physical ministry. So when the maid brought the message, all that her cunning could provide her with at the moment was the pretence, that he had called so opportunely by chance.

"Ask him to walk up," she said, after just one moment's hesitation.

Adela heard the direction her aunt gave, through the cold shiver which was then obliterating rather than engrossing her attention, and concluded that they had sent for Mr. Armstrong. But Mrs. Cathcart, turning towards her, said,—

"Adela, my love, Dr. Wade has just called; and I have asked him to step upstairs."

The patient started up.

"Aunt, what do you mean? If that old wife comes into this room, I will make him glad to go out of it!"

You see she was feverish, poor child, else I am sure she could not have been so rude to her aunt. But before Mrs. Cathcart could reply, in came Dr. Wade. He walked right up to the bed, after a stately obeisance to the lady attendant.

"I am sorry to find you so ill, Miss Cathcart."

"I am perfectly well, Dr. Wade. I am sorry you have had the trouble of walking upstairs."

As she said this, she rang the bell at the head of her bed.

Her maid, who had been listening at the door, entered at once.—I had all this from Adela herself afterwards.

“Emma, bring me my desk. Dr. Wade, there must be some mistake. It was my aunt, Mrs. Cathcart, who sent for you. Had she given me the opportunity, I would have begged that the interview might take place in her room instead of mine.”

Dr. Wade retreated towards the fireplace, where Mrs. Cathcart stood, quite aware that she had got herself into a mess of no ordinary complication. Yet she persisted in her cunning. She lifted her finger to her forehead.

“Ah?” said Dr. Wade.

“Yes,” said Mrs. Cathcart.

“Wandering?”

“Dreadfully.”

After some more whispering, the doctor sat down to write a prescription. But meantime Adela was busy writing another. What she wrote was precisely to this effect—

“DEAR MR. ARMSTRONG,

“I have caught a bad cold, and my aunt has let loose Dr. Wade upon me. Please come directly, if you will save me from ever so much nasty medicine, at the least. My aunt is not my mother, thank heaven! though she would gladly usurp that relationship.

“Yours most truly,

“ADELA CATHCART.”

She folded and sealed the note—sealed it carefully—and gave it to Emma, who vanished with it, followed instantly by Mrs. Cathcart. As to what took place outside the door—shall I confess it?—Beeves is my informant.

“Where are you going, Emma? Emma, come here directly,” said Mrs. Cathcart.

Emma obeyed.

"I am going a message for mis'ess."

"Who is that note for?"

"I didn't ask. John can read well enough."

"Show it me."

Emma, I presume, closed both lips and hand very tight.

"I command you."

"Miss Cathcart pays me my wages, ma'am," said Emma, and turning, sped downstairs like a carrier-pigeon.

In the hall she met Beeves, and told him the story.

"There she comes!" cried he. "Give me the letter. I'll take it myself."

"You're not going without your hat, surely, Mr. Beeves?" said Emma.

"Bless me! It's downstairs. There's master's old one! He'll never want it again. And if he does, it'll be none the worse."

And he was out of the door in a moment. Beeves's alarm, however, as to Mrs. Cathcart's approach, was a false one. She returned into the sick chamber, with a face fiery red, and found Dr. Wade just finishing an elaborate prescription.

"There!" said he, rising. "Send for that at once, and let it be taken directly. Good morning."

He left the room instantly, making signs that he was afraid of exciting his patient, as she did not appear to approve of his presence.

"What is the prescription?" said Adela, quite quietly, as Mrs. Cathcart approached the bed, apparently trying to decipher it.

"I am glad to see you so much calmer, my dear. You must not excite yourself. The prescription?—I cannot make it out. Doctors do write so badly. I suppose they consider it professional."

"They consider a good many things professional which are only stupid. Let me see it."

Mrs. Cathcart, thrown off her guard, gave it to her. Adela tore it in fragments, and threw it in a little storm on the floor.

"Adela!" screamed Mrs. Cathcart. "What *is* to be done?"

"Pay Dr. Wade his fee, and tell him I shall never be too ill to refuse his medicines. Now, aunt! You find I am determined.—I declare you make me behave so ill that I am ashamed of myself."

Here the poor impertinent child crept under the clothes, and fell a-weeping bitterly. Mrs. Cathcart had sense enough to see that nothing could be done, and retired to her room. Getting weary of her own society after a few moments of solitude, she proceeded to go downstairs. But half-way down, she was met full in the face by Harry Armstrong, ascending two steps at a time. He had already met Dr. Wade, as he came out of the dining-room, where he had been having an interview with the colonel. Harry had turned, and held out his hand with a "How do you do, Dr. Wade?" But that gentleman had bowed with the utmost stiffness, and kept his hand at home.

"So it is to be open war and mutual slander, is it, Dr. Wade?" said Harry. "In that case, I want to know how you come to interfere with my patient. I have had no dismissal, which punctilio I took care to know was observed in your case."

"Sir, I was sent for," said Dr. Wade, haughtily.

"I have in my pocket a note from the lady of this house requesting my immediate attendance. If you have received a request to the same purport from a visitor, you obey it at your own risk. Good morning."

Then Harry walked quietly up the first half of the stair, while

Beeves hastened to open the door to the crestfallen Dr. Wade; but by the time he met Mrs. Cathcart, his rate of ascent had considerably increased. As soon as she saw him, however, without paying any attention to the usual formality of a greeting, she turned and re-entered her niece's room. Her eyes were flashing, and her face spotted red and white with helpless rage. But she would not abandon the field. Harry bowed to her, and passed on to the bed, where he was greeted with a smile.

"There's not much the matter, I hope?" he said, returning the smile.

"It may suit you to make light of my niece's illness, Mr. Armstrong, but I beg to inform you that her father thought it serious enough to send for Dr. Wade. He has been here already, and your attendance is quite superfluous."

"No doubt; no doubt. But as I am here, I may as well prescribe."

"Dr. Wade has already prescribed."

"And I have taken his prescription, have I not, aunt?—and destroyed it, Mr. Armstrong, instead of my own chance."

"Of what?" said Mrs. Cathcart, with vulgar significance.

"Of getting rid of two officious old women at once," said Adela—in a rage, I fear I must confess, as the only excuse for impertinence.

"Come, come," said Harry, "this won't do. I cannot have my patient excited in this way. Miss Cathcart, may I ring for your maid?"

For answer, Adela rang the bell herself. Her aunt was pretending to look out of the window.

"Will you go and ask your master," said Harry, when Emma made her appearance, "to be so kind as to come here for a moment?"

The poor colonel—an excellent soldier, a severe master,

with the highest notions of authority and obedience—found himself degraded by his own conduct, as other autocrats have proved before, into a temporizing incapable. It was the more humiliating that he was quite aware in his own honest heart that it was jealousy of Harry that had brought him into this painful position. But he obeyed the summons at once; for wherever there was anything unpleasant to be done, there, with him, duty assumed the sterner command. As soon as he entered the room, Harry, without giving time for any one else to determine the course of the conference, said :

“There has been some mistake, Colonel Cathcart, between Dr. Wade and myself, which has already done Miss Cathcart no good. As I find her very feverish, though not by any means alarmingly ill, I must, as her medical attendant, insist that *no* one come into her room but yourself or her maid.”

Every one present perfectly understood this; and, however, in other circumstances, the colonel might have resented the tone of authority with which Harry spoke, he was compelled, for his daughter's sake, to yield; and he afterwards justified Harry entirely. Mrs. Cathcart walked out of the room with her neck invisible from behind. The colonel sat down by the fire. Harry wrote his prescription on the half sheet from which Dr. Wade had torn his; and then saying that he would call in the evening, took his leave of the colonel, and bowed to his patient, receiving a glance of acknowledgment which could not fail to generate the feeling that there was a secret understanding between them, and that he had done just what she wanted. He mounted his roan horse, called Rhubarb, with a certain elation of being, which he tried to hide from every one but himself.

When doctors forget that their patients are more like musical instruments than machines, they will soon need to be reminded that they are men and women, and not dogs or

horses. Yet, alas for the poor dogs and horses that fall into the hands of a man without a human sympathy even with them! I, John Smith, bless you, my doctor-friends, that ye are not doctors merely, but good and loving men; and, in virtue thereof, so much the more—so exceedingly the more *Therapeutae*.

I need not follow the course of the fever. Each day the arrival of the cold fit was longer delayed, and the violence of both diminished, until they disappeared altogether. But a day or two before this happy result was completed, Adela had been allowed to go down to the drawing-room, and had delighted her father with her cheerfulness and hopefulness. It really seemed as if the ague had carried off the last remnants of the illness under which she had been so long labouring. But then, you can never put anything to the *experimentum crucis*; and there were other causes at work for Adela's cure, which were perhaps more powerful than even the ague. However this may have been, she got almost quite well in a very short space of time; and with her father's consent, issued invitations to another meeting of the story-club. They were at once satisfactorily responded to.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PERCY.

By this time Percy had returned to London. His mother remained ; but the terms understood between her niece and herself were those of icy politeness and reserve. I learned afterwards that something of an understanding had also been arrived at between Percy and Harry ; ever since learning the particulars of which, I have liked the young rascal a great deal better. So I will trouble my reader to take an interest in my report of the affair.

Percy met Harry at the gate, after one of his professional visits, and accosted him thus :

"Mr. Armstrong, my mother says you have been rude to her."

"I am not in the least aware of it, Mr. Percy."

"Oh ! I don't care much. She *is* provoking. Besides, she can take care of herself. That's not it."

"What is it, then ?"

"What do you mean about Adela ?"

"I have said nothing more than that she has had a sharp attack of intermittent fever, which is going off."

"Come, come—you know what I mean."

"I may suspect, but I don't choose to answer hints, the meaning of which I *only* suspect. I might make a fool of myself."

“Well, I’ll be plain. Are you in love with her?”

“Suppose I were, you are not the first to whom I should think it necessary to confess.”

“Well, are you paying your addresses to her?”

“I am sorry I cannot consent to make my answers as frank as your questions. You have the advantage of me in straightforwardness, I confess. Only you have got sun and wind of me both.”

“Come, come—I hate dodging.”

“I daresay you do. But just let me shift round a bit, and see what you will do then.—Are *you* in love with Miss Cathcart?”

“Yes.”

“Upon my word, I shouldn’t have thought it. Here have we been all positively conspiring to do her good, and you have been paying ten times the attention to the dogs and horses that you have paid to her.”

“By Jove! it’s quite true. But I couldn’t, somehow.”

“Then she hasn’t encouraged you?”

“By Jupiter! you are frank enough now.—No, damn it—not a bit.—But she used to like me, and she would again, if you would let her alone.”

“Now, Mr. Percy, I’ll tell you what.—I don’t believe you are a bit in love with her.”

“She’s devilish pretty.”

“Well?”

“And I declare I think she got prettier and prettier every day till this cursed ague took her.—Your fault too, my mother says.”

“We’ll leave your mother out of the question now, if you please. Do you know what made her look prettier and prettier—for you are quite right about that?”

“No. I suppose you were giving her arsenic.”

"No. I was giving her the true *elixir vitæ*, unknown even to the Rosicrucians."

Percy stared.

"I will explain myself. Her friend, Mr. Smith—"

"Old fogie !"

"Old bachelor—yes.—Mr. Smith and I agreed that she was dying of ennui ; and so we got up this story-club, and got my brother and the rest to bear a hand in it. It did her all the good the most sanguine of us could have hoped for."

"I thought it horrid slow."

"I am surprised at that, for you were generally asleep."

"I was forced, in self-defence. I couldn't smoke."

"It gave her something to think about."

"So it seems."

"Now, Mr. Percy, how could you think you had the smallest chance with her, when here was first one and then another turning each the flash of his own mental prism upon her weary eyes, and healing them with light ; while you would not take the smallest trouble to gratify her, or even to show yourself to anything like advantage?—My dear fellow, what a fool you are !"

"Mr. Armstrong !"

"Come, come—you began with frankness, and I've only gone on with it. You are a good-hearted fellow, and ought to be made something of."

"At all events, you make something of yourself, to talk of your own productions as the *elixir vitæ*."

"You forget that I am in disgrace as well as yourself on that score ; for I have not read a word of my own since the club began."

"Then how the devil should I be worse off than you?"

"I didn't say you were. I only said you did your best to place yourself at a disadvantage. I at least took a part in the affair, although a very humble one. But depend upon it, a

girl like Miss Cathcart thinks more of mental gifts, than of any outward advantages which a man may possess ; and in the company of those who *think*, a fellow's good looks don't go for much. She could not help measuring you by those other men—and women too. But you may console yourself with the reflection that there are plenty of girls, and pretty ones too, of a very different way of judging ; and for my part you are welcome to the pick of them."

"You mean to say that I shan't have Addie?"

"Not in the least. But, come now—do you think yourself worthy of a girl like that?"

"No. Do you?"

"No. But I should not feel such a hypocrite if she thought me worthy, as to give her up on that ground."

"Then what *do* you mean?"

"To win her, if I can."

"Whew!"

"But if you are a gentleman, you will let me say so myself, and not betray my secret."

"Damned if I do! Good luck to you! There's my hand. I believe you're a good fellow after all. I wish I had seen you ride to hounds. They tell me it's a sight."

"Thank you heartily. But what are you going to do?"

"Go back to the sweet-flowing Thames, and the dreams of the desk."

"Well—be a man as well as a gentleman. Don't be a fool."

"Hang it all! I believe it was her money, after all, I was in love with. Good-bye!"

But the poor fellow looked grave enough as he went away. And I trust that, before long, he, too, began to reap some of the good corn that grows on the wintry fields of disappointment.—I have my eye upon him ; but it is little an *old fogie* like me can do with a fellow like Percy.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DOCTOR'S MARE.

Now to return to the Story-Club.

On the night appointed, we met. And to the delight of all the rest of us, Harry arrived with a look that satisfied us that he was to be no defaulter this time. The look was one of almost nervous uneasiness. Of course this sprang from anxiety to please Adela—at least, so I interpreted it. She occupied her old place on the couch; we all arranged ourselves nearly as before; and the fire was burning very bright. Before he began, however, Harry, turning to our host, said:

“May I arrange the scene as I please, for the right effect of my story?”

“Certainly,” answered the colonel.

Harry rose and extinguished the lamp.

“But, my dear sir,” said the colonel, “how can you read now?”

“Perfectly, by the firelight,” answered Harry.

He then went to the windows, and drawing aside the curtains, drew up the blinds.

It was full high moon, and the light so clear that, notwithstanding the brightness of the fire, each window seemed to lie in ghostly shimmer on the floor. Not a breath of wind was abroad. The whole country being covered with snow, the air was filled with a snowy light. On one side rose the high roof

of another part of the house, on which the snow was lying thick and smooth, undisturbed save by the footprints, visible in the moon, of a large black cat, which had now paused in the middle of it, and was looking round suspiciously towards the source of the light which had surprised him in his midnight walk.

"Now," said Harry, returning to his seat, and putting on an air of confidence to conceal the lack of it, "let any one who has nerves retire at once, both for his own sake and that of the company! This is just such a night as I wanted to read my story in—snow—stillness—moonlight outside, and nothing but firelight inside. Mind, Ralph, you keep up the fire, for the room will be more ready to get cold now the coverings are off the windows.—You will say at once if you feel it cold, Miss Cathcart?"

Adela promised; and Harry, who had his manuscript gummed together in a continuous roll, so that he might not have to turn over any leaves, began at once.—*The Cruel Painter.*

It was rather a dreadful story. No one interrupted him. His brother put a shovelful of coals on the fire, to keep up the flame; but not a word had been spoken. The cold moon had shone in at the windows all the time, her light made yet colder by the snowy sheen from the face of the earth; and any horror that the story could generate had had full freedom to operate on the minds of the listeners.

"Well, I'm glad it's over, for my part," said Mrs. Bloomfield "It made my flesh creep."

"I do not see any good in founding a story upon a superstition. One knows it is false, all the time," said Mrs. Cathcart.

"But," said Harry, "all that I have related might have taken place; for the story is not founded on the superstition itself, but on the belief of the people of the time in the superstition. I have merely used this belief to give the general tone to the

story, and sometimes the particular occasion for events in it, the vampire being a terrible fact to those times."

"You write," said the curate, "as if you quoted occasionally from some authority."

"The story of John Kuntz, as well as that of the shoemaker, is told by Henry More in his *Antidote against Atheism*. He believed the whole affair. His authority is Martin Weinrich, a Silesian doctor. I have only taken the liberty of shifting the scene of the *post-mortem* exploits of Kuntz from a town of Silesia to Prague."

"Well, Harry," said his sister-in-law, "if your object was to frighten us, I confess that I for one was tolerably uncomfortable. But I don't know that that is a very high aim in story-telling."

"If that were all—certainly not," replied Harry, glancing towards Adela, who had not spoken. Nor did she speak yet. But her expression showed plainly enough that it was not the horror of the story that had taken chief hold of her mind. Her face was full of suppressed light, and she was evidently satisfied—or shall I call it *gratified*?—as well as delighted with the tale. Something or other in it had touched her not only deeply, but nearly.

Nothing was said about another meeting—perhaps because, from Adela's illness, the order had been interrupted, and the present had required a special summons.

The ladies had gone upstairs to put on their bonnets. I had crossed into the library, which was on the same floor with the drawing-room, to find out if I was right in supposing I had seen some volumes of Henry More's works on the shelves—certainly the colonel could never have bought them. Our host, the curate and the schoolmaster had followed me. Harry had remained behind in the drawing-room. Thinking of something I wanted to say to him before he went, I left the gentle-

men looking over the book-shelves, and went to cross again to the drawing-room. But when I reached the door, there stood at the top of the stair, Adela and Harry. She had evidently just said something warm about the story. I could almost read what she had said still lingering on her face, which was turned up a good deal to look into his, so near each other were they standing. Hers had a rosy flush as of sunset over it, while his glowed like the sun rising in a mist. Evidently the pleasures of giving and receiving were in this case nearly equal. But they were not of long duration ; for the moment I appeared, they bade each other a hurried good-night, and parted. I, thinking it better to pretermitt my speech to Harry, retreated into the library, and was glad to think that no one had seen that conference but myself. Such a conjunction of planets prefigured, however, not merely warm spring weather, but sultry gloom, and thunderous clouds to follow ; and although I was delighted with my astronomical observation, I could not help growing anxious about the omen.

The next day, as I passed the school-house on my way to call on the curate, I heard such an uproar that I stopped involuntarily to listen. I soon satisfied myself that it was only the usual waterspout occasioned on the ocean of boyhood by the vacuum of the master. As soon as I entered the curate's study, there stood the missing master, hat in hand. He had not sat down, and would not, hearing all the time, no doubt, in his soul, the far confusion of his forsaken realm. He had but that moment entered.

“You come just in the right time, Smith,” said the curate.—“We had already dropped unnecessary prefixes.—“Here is Mr. Bloomfield come to ask us to spend a final evening with him and Mrs. Bloomfield. And in the name of the whole company, I have taken upon me to assure him that it will give us pleasure. Am I not right ?”

"Undoubtedly," I replied. "What evening have you fixed upon, Mr. Bloomfield?"

"This day week," he answered. "Shall I tell you why I put it off so long?"

"If you please."

"I heard your brother, Mr. Armstrong, say that you were very fond of parables. Now I have always had a leaning that way myself; and for years I have had one in particular glimmering before my mental sight. The ambition seized me, to write it out for one of our meetings, and so submit it to your judgment; for, Mr. Armstrong, I am so delighted with your sermons and opinions generally, that I long to let you know that I am not only friendly, but capable of sympathizing with you. But it is only in the rough yet, and I want to have plenty of time to act the dutiful bear to my offspring, and lick it into thorough shape. So if you will come this day week, Mrs. Bloomfield and I will be delighted to entertain you in our humble fashion. But, bless me! the boys will be all in a heap of confusion worse confounded before I get back to them. I have no business to be away from them at this hour. Good morning, gentlemen."

And off ran the worthy Neptune, to quell, by the vision of his returning head, the rebellious waves of boyish impulse.

"That man will be a great comfort to you, Armstrong," I said.

"I know he will. He is a far-seeing, and what is better, a far-feeling man."

"There is true wealth in him, it seems to me, although it may be of narrow reach in expression," said I.

"I think so, quite. He seems to me to be one of those who have never grown robust because they have laboured in-doors instead of going out to work in the open air. There is a shrinking delicacy about him when with those whom he doesn't

feel to be of his own kind, which makes him show to a disadvantage. But you should see him amongst his boys to do him justice."

We were interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Armstrong, who came, after their simple fashion, to tell her husband that dinner was ready. I took my leave.

In the evening, Mrs. Bloomfield called to invite Adela and the colonel; and the affair was settled for that day week.

"You're much better, my dear, are you not?" said the worthy woman to my niece.

"Indeed I am, Mrs. Bloomfield. I could not have believed it possible that I should be so much better in so short a time—and at this season of the year too."

"Mr. Armstrong is a very clever young man, I think; though I can't say I quite relished that extraordinary story of his."

"I suppose he is clever," replied Adela, something demurely as I thought. "I must say I liked the story."

"Ah, well! Young people, you know, Mr. Smith.—But, bless me! I'm sure I beg your pardon. I had forgotten you weren't a married man. Of course you're one of the young people too, Mr. Smith."

"I don't think there's much of youth to choose between you and me, Mrs. Bloomfield," said I, "if I may venture to say so. But I fear I do belong to the young people, if a liking for extravagant stories, so long as they mean well, you know—is to be the test of the classification. I fear I have a depraved taste, that way. I don't mean in this particular instance, though, Adela."

"I hope not," answered Adela, with a blushing smile, which I, at least, could read, having had not merely the key to it, but the open door and window as well, ever since I had seen the two standing together at the top of the stair.

That night the weather broke. A slow thaw set in; and

before many days were over, islands of green began to appear amid the "wan water" of the snow—to use a phrase common in Scotch ballads, though with a different application. The graves in the churchyard lifted up their green altars of earth, as the first whereon to return thanks for the prophecy of spring; which, surely, if it has force and truth anywhere, speaks loudest to us in the churchyard. And on Sunday the sun broke out and shone on the green hillocks, just as good old Mr. Venables was reading the words, "I will not leave you comfortless—I will come to you."

And the ice vanished from the river, and the dark stream flowed, somewhat sullen, but yet glad at heart, on through the low meadows bordered with pollards, which, poor things, maltreated and mutilated, yet did the best they could, and went on growing wildly in all insane shapes—pitifully mingling formality and grotesqueness.

And the next day the hounds met at Castle Irksham. And that day Colonel Cathcart would ride with them.

For the good man had gathered spirit just as the light grew upon his daughter's face. And he was merry like a boy now that the first breath of spring—for so it seemed, although no doubt plenty of wintriness remained and would yet show itself—had loosened the hard hold of the frost, which is the death of Nature. The frost is hard upon old people; and the spring is so much the more genial and blessed in its sweet influences on them. Do we grow old that, in our weakness and loss of physical self-assertion, we may learn the benignities of the universe—only to be learned first through the feeling of their want?—I do not envy the man who laughs the east wind to scorn. He can never know the balmy power of its sister of the west, which is the breath of the Lord, the symbol of the one *genial* strength at the root of all life, resurrection, and growth—commonly called the Spirit of God.—Who has not seen, as

the infirmities of age grow upon old men, the haughty, self-reliant spirit that had neglected, if not despised the gentle ministrations of love, grow as it were a little scared, and begin to look about for some kindness; begin to return the warm pressure of the hand, and to submit to be waited upon by the anxiety of love? Not in weakness alone comes the second childhood upon men, but often in childlikeness; for in old age, as in nature, to quote the song of the curate,

old Autumn's fingers
Paint in hues of Spring.

The necessities of the old man prefigure and forerun the dawn of the immortal childhood. For is not our necessity towards God our highest blessedness—the fair cloud that hangs over the summit of existence? Thank God, he has made his children so noble and high that they cannot do without Him! I believe we are sent into this world just to find this out.

But to leave my reflections and return to my story—such as it is. The colonel mounted me on an old horse of his, “whom,” to quote from Sir Philip Sidney’s *Arcadia*, “though he was near twenty years old, he preferred for a piece of sure service, before a great number of younger.” Now the piece of sure service, in the present instance, was to take care of old John Smith, who was only a middling horseman, though his friend, the colonel, would say that he rode pretty well for a lad. The old horse, in fact, knew not only what he could do, but what I could do, for our powers were about equal. He looked well about for the gaps and the narrow places. From weakness in his forelegs, he had become a capital buck-jumper, as I think Cathcart called him, always alighting over a hedge on his hind legs, instead of his fore ones, which was as much easier for John Smith as for Hop o’ my Thumb—that

was the name of the old horse, he being sixteen hands, at least. But I beg my reader's pardon for troubling him with all this about my horse, for, assuredly, neither he nor I will perform any deed of prowess in his presence. But I have the weakness of garrulity in regard to a predilection from the indulgence of which circumstances have debarred me.

At nine o'clock my friend and I started upon hacks for the meet. Now, I am not going to describe the "harrow and weal away!" with which the soul of poor Reynard is hunted out of the world—if, indeed, such a clever wretch can have a soul. I daresay—I hope, at least, that the argument of the fox-hunter is analogically just, who, being expostulated with on the cruelty of fox-hunting, replied—"Well, you know, the hounds like it; and the horses like it; and there's no doubt the men like it—and who knows whether the fox doesn't like it too?" But I would not have introduced the subject except for the sake of what my reader will find in the course of a page or two, and which assuredly is not fox-hunting.

We soon found. But just before, a sudden heavy noise, coming apparently from a considerable distance, made one or two of the company say, with passing curiosity: "What is that?" It was instantly forgotten, however, as soon as the fox broke cover. He pointed towards Purley-bridge. We had followed for some distance, circumstances permitting Hop o' my Thumb to keep in the wake of his master, when the colonel, drawing rein, allowed me—I ought to say *us*, for the old horse had quite as much voice in the matter as I had—to come up with him.

"The cunning old dog!" said he. "He has run straight for the deepest cutting in the railway. They'll all be pounded presently! They don't know this part so well as I do. I know every field and gate in it. I used to go larking over it all when I was only a cub myself. Confound it! I'm not up

to much to-day. I suppose I'm getting old, you know ; or I'd strike off here at right angles to the left, and make for the bridge at Crumple's Corner. I should lose the hounds though, I fear. I wonder what his lordship will do."

All the time my old friend was talking, we were following the rest of the field, whom, sure enough, as soon as we got into the next inclosure, we saw drawing up one after another on the top of the railway cutting, which ran like the river of death between them and the fox-hunter's paradise. But at the moment we entered this field, whom should we see approaching us at right angles, from the direction of Purley-bridge, but Harry Armstrong, mounted on *the* mare! I rode towards him.

"Trapped, you see," said I. "Are you after the fox—or some nobler game?"

"I was going my rounds," answered Harry, "when I caught sight of the hounds. I have no very pressing case to-day, so I turned a few yards out of the road to see a bit of the sport. Confound these railways!"

At the moment—and all this passed, as the story-teller is so often compelled to remind his reader, in far less time than it takes to tell—over the hedge on the opposite side from where Harry had entered the field, blundered a country fellow, on a great, heavy, but spirited horse, and ploughed his way up the soft furrow to where we stood.

"Doctor!" he cried, half-breathless with haste and exertion—"Doctor!"

"Well?" answered Henry, alert.

"There's a awful accident at Grubblebon Quarry, sir. Powder blowed up. Legs and arms! Good God! sir, make haste."

"Well," said Harry, whose compressed lips alone gave sign of his being ready for action, "ride to the town, and tell my

housekeeper to give you bandages and wadding and oil, and splints, and whatever she knows to be needful. Are there many hurt?"

"Half a dozen alive, sir."

"Then you'd better let the other doctors know as well. And just tell my man to saddle Jilter and take him to my brother, the curate. He had better come out at once. Ride now."

"I *will*, sir," said the man, and was over the hedge in another minute.

But not before Harry was over the railway. For he rode gently towards it, as if nothing particular was to be done, and chose as the best spot one close to where several of the gentlemen stood, disputing for a moment as to which was the best way to get across. Now on the top of the cutting there was a rail, and between the rail and the edge of the cutting a space of about four feet. Harry trotted his mare gently up to the rail, and went over. Nor was the mutual confidence of mare and master misplaced from either side. She lighted and stood stock still within a foot of the slope, so powerful was she to stop herself. An uproar of cries arose among the men. I heard the old soldier's voice above them all.

"Damn you, Armstrong, you fool!" he cried; "you'll break your neck, and serve you right too!"

I don't know a stronger proof that the classical hell has little hold on the faith of the Saxons, than that good-hearted and true men will not unfrequently damn their friends when they are most anxious to save them. But before the words were half out of the colonel's mouth, Harry was half-way down the cutting. He had gone straight at it like a cat, and it was of course the only way. I had galloped to the edge after him, and now saw him or rather her, descending by a succession of rebounds — not bounds — a succession, in fact, of short

falls upon the fore-legs, while Harry's head was nearly touching her rump. Arrived at the bottom, she gave two bounds across the rails, and the same moment was straining right up the opposite bank in a fierce agony of effort, Harry hanging upon her neck. Now the mighty play of her magnificent hind-quarters came into operation. I could see, plainly enough across the gulf, the alternate knotting and loosening of the thick muscles as, step by step, she tore her way up the grassy slope. It was a terrible trial of muscle and wind, and very few horses could have stood it. As she neared the top, her pace grew slower and slower, and the exertion more and more severe. If she had given in, she would have rolled to the bottom, but nothing was less in her thoughts. Her master never spurred or urged her, except it may have been by whispering in her ear, to which his mouth was near enough: he knew she needed no excitement to that effort. At length the final heave of her rump, as it came up to a level with her withers, told the breathless spectators that the attempt was a success, when a loud "Hurrah for the doctor and his mare!" burst from their lips. The doctor, however, only waved his hand in acknowledgment, for he had all to do yet. Fortunately there was space enough between the edge and the fence on that side to allow of his giving his mare a quarter of a circle of a gallop before bringing her up to the rail, else in her fatigue she might have failed to top it. Over she went and away, with her tail streaming out behind her, as if she had done nothing worth thinking about, once it was done. One more cheer for the doctor—but no one dared to follow him. They scattered in different directions to find a less perilous crossing. I stuck by my leader.

"By Jove! Cathcart," said Lord Irksham, as they parted, "that doctor of yours is a hero. He ought to have been bred a soldier."

"He's better employed, my lord," bawled the old colonel; for

they were now a good many yards asunder, making for different points in the hedge. From this answer, I hoped well for the doctor. At all events, the colonel admired his manliness more than ever, and that was a great thing. For me, I could hardly keep down the expression of an excitement which I did not wish to show. It was a great relief to me when the *hurrah* ! arose, and I could let myself off in that way. I told you, kind reader, I was only an old boy. But, as the Arabs always give God thanks when they see a beautiful woman, and quite right too ! so, in my heart, I praised God who had made a mare with such muscles, and a man with such a heart. And I said to myself, “A fine muscle is a fine thing ; but the finest muscle of all, keeping the others going too, is the heart itself. That is the true Christian muscle. And the real muscular Christianity is that which pours in a life-giving torrent from the devotion of the heart, receiving only that it may give.

But I fancy I hear my reader saying,

“Mr. Smith, you’ve forgotten the fox. What a sportsman you make !”

Well, I had forgotten the fox. But then we didn’t kill him or find another that day. So you won’t care for the rest of the run.

I was tired enough by the time we got back to Purley-bridge. I went early to bed.

The next morning, the colonel, the moment we met at the breakfast table, said to me,—

“You did not hear, Smith, what that young rascal of a doctor said to Lord Irksham last night ?”

“No, what was it ?”

“It seems they met again towards evening, and his lordship said to him : ‘You hare-brained young devil !’—you know his lordship’s rough way,” interposed the colonel, forgetting how roundly he had sworn at Harry himself, “ ‘by the time you’re

my age, you'll be more careful of the few brains you'll have left.' To which expostulation Master Harry replied : ' If your lordship had been my age, you would have done it yourself to kill a fox : when I am your lordship's age, I hope I shall have the grace left to do as much to save a man.' Whereupon his lordship rejoined, holding out his hand, ' By Jove ! sir, you are an honour to your profession. Come and dine with me on Monday.' And what do you think the idiot did ?—Backed out of it, and wouldn't go, because he thought his lordship condescending, and he didn't want his patronage. But his lordship's not a bit like that, you know."

" Then if he isn't, he'll like Harry all the better for declining, and will probably send him a proper invitation."

And sure enough, I was right ; and Harry did dine at Castle Irksham on Monday.

Adela's eyes showed clearly enough that her ears were devouring every word we had said ; and the glow on her face could not be mistaken by me at least, though to another it might well appear only the sign of such an enthusiasm as one would like every girl to feel in the presence of noble conduct of any kind. She had heard the whole story last night you may be sure ; and I do not doubt that the unrestrained admiration shown by her father for the doctor's conduct, was a light in her heart which sleep itself could not extinguish, and which went shining on in her dreams. Admiration of the beloved is dear to a woman. You see I like to show that although I *am* an old bachelor, I know something about *them*.

I met Harry that morning ; that is, I contrived to meet him.

" Well, how are you to-day, Harry ? " I said.

" All right, thank you."

" Were there many hurt at the quarry ? "

" Oh ! it wasn't so very bad, I'm happy to say."

"You did splendidly yesterday."

"Oh, nonsense! It was my mare. It wasn't me. I had nothing to do with it."

"Well! well! you have my full permission to say so, and to think so, too."

"Well! well! say no more about it."

So it was long before the subject was again alluded to by me. But it will be long, too, before it is forgotten in that county.

CHAPTER XX.

A PARABLE.

AND so the evening came when we were to meet—for the last time as the Story-telling Club—at the schoolmaster's house. It was now past the time I had set myself for returning to London, and although my plans were never of a very unalterable complexion, seeing I had the faculty of being able to write wherever I was, and never admitted chairs and tables, and certain rows of bookshelves, to form part of my mental organism, without which the rest of the mechanism would be thrown out of gear, I had yet reasons for wishing to be in London; and I intended to take my departure on the day but one after the final meeting.—I may just remark, that before this time one or two families had returned to Purley-bridge, and others were free from their Christmas engagements, who would have been much pleased to join our club; but, considering its ephemeral nature, and seeing it had been formed only for what we hoped was a passing necessity, we felt that the introduction of new blood, although essential for the long life of anything constituted for long life, would only hasten the decay of its butterfly constitution. So we had kept our meetings entirely to ourselves.

We all arrived about the same time, and found our host and hostess full of quiet cordiality, to which their homeliness

lent an additional charm. The relation of host and guest is weakened by every addition to a company, and in a large assembly all but disappears. Indeed, the tendency of the present age is to blot from the story of every-day life all reminders of the ordinary human relations, as commonplace and insignificant, and to mingle all society in one concourse of atoms, in which the only distinctions shall be those of *rank*; whereas the sole power to keep social intercourse from growing stale is the recognition of the immortal and true in all the simple human relations. Then we look upon all men with reverence, and find ourselves safe and at home in the midst of divine intents, which may be violated and striven with, but can never be escaped, because the will of God is the very life and well-being of his creatures.

Mrs. Bloomfield looked very nice in her black silk dress, and collar and cuffs of old lace, as she presided at the tea-table, and made us all feel that it was a pleasure to her to serve us.

After repeated apologies, and confessions of failure, our host then read *The Castle: A Parable*. So he called it; but I think it would be more correct to call it an *allegory*. As that word, however, has so many wearisome associations, I too, whether correctly or not, would call it a parable.

"Thank you, heartily," said the curate, when the school-master had finished. "I will choose another time to tell you how much I have enjoyed your parable, which is altogether to my mind, and far beyond anything I could do, though I should like to read you a little thing of the sort I once wrote: I will run and fetch it."

Mr. Bloomfield returned no answer, but his countenance showed that he was far from hearing this praise unmoved. The faces of the rest showed that they too had listened with pleasure; and Adela's face shone as if she had received more

than delight—hope, namely, and onward impulse. A good deal of talk ensued. The colonel alone—I forgot to say that Mrs. Cathcart had a headache, and did not come—seemed to have been left behind.

“I am a stupid old fellow, I believe,” said he; “but to tell the truth, I did not know what to make of it. It seemed all the time to be telling me in one breath something I knew and something I didn’t and couldn’t know. I wish I could express what I mean, but it puzzled me too much for that; although every now and then it sounded very beautiful indeed.”

“I will try and tell you what it said to me, sometime, papa,” said Adela.

“Thank you, my child; I should much like to understand it. I believe I have done my duty by my king and country, but a man has to learn a good deal after all that is over and done with; and I suppose it is never too late to begin, Mr. Armstrong?” he said, turning to the curate, who that moment re-entered the room.

“On the contrary, I not merely believe that no future time can be so good as the present, but I am inclined to assert that no past time could have been so good as the present. This seems to be a paradox, but I think I could explain it very easily. I would rather, however, read *my* little parable, if I may.”

All assenting heartily, he read as follows:—

“There was once a wise man to whom was granted the power to send forth his thoughts in shapes that other people could see. And, as he walked abroad in the world, he came upon some whom his wisdom might serve. One day, having, in a street of the city where he dwelt, rescued from danger a boy about ten years of age, he went with him to his mother, and begged that he might take him to his house for a week. When they heard his name, the parents willingly let their son go with him. And

he taught him many things, and the boy loved and trusted him.

“When the boy was asleep in bed, the wise man would go to his room at midnight, and lay his ear to his ear, and hearken to his dreams. Then he would stand and spread out his arms over him and look up. And the boy would smile, and his sleep was the deeper.

“Once, just an hour after the sage had thus visited him, the boy woke, and found himself alone in the middle of the night. He could not get to sleep again, and grew so restless that he rose and went down the stair. The moon shone in at every western window, and his way was ‘now in glimmer and now in gloom.’ On the first landing he saw a door wide open, which he had never seen open till now. It was the door of the wizard’s room. Within, all was bright with moonlight, and the boy first peeped, then stepped in, and peered timidly about him.

“The farther end of the room was hidden by a curtain stretched quite across it, and, curious to see what was behind, he approached it. But ere he reached it, the curtain slowly divided in the midst and, drawn back to each side, revealed a place with just light enough in it from the moonshine to show that it was a dungeon. In the middle of it, upon the floor, sat a prisoner, with fetters to his feet, and manacles to his hands; an iron collar was round his neck, and a chain from the collar had its last link in an iron staple deep-fixed in the stone floor. His head was sunk on his bosom, and he sat abject and despairing.

“What a wicked man he must be!” thought the boy, and was turning to run away in terror, when the man lifted his head, and his look caught and held him. For he saw a pale, worn, fierce countenance, which, somehow, through all the added years, and all the dirt that defiled it, he recognized as

his own. For a moment the prisoner gazed at him mournfully ; then a wild passion of rage and despair seized him ; he dragged and tore at his chains, raved and shrieked, and dashed himself on the ground like one mad with imprisonment. For a time he lay exhausted, then half rose and sat as before, gazing helplessly upon the ground.

“By-and-by a spider came creeping along the bar of his fetters. He put out his hand, and, with the manacle on his wrist, crushed it, and smiled. Instantly through the gloom came a strong, clear, yet strangely sweet voice—and the very sweetness had in it something that made the boy think of fire. And the voice said :—

“‘So ! in the midst of misery, thou takest delight in destruction ! Is it not well thou art chained ? If thou wast free, thou wouldst in time destroy the world. Tame thy wild beast, or sit there till I tame him.’

“The prisoner peered and stared through the dusk, but could see no one ; he fell into another fit of furious raving, but not a hair-breadth would one link of chain yield to his wildest endeavour.

“‘Oh, my mother !’ he cried, as he sank again into the grave of exhaustion.

“‘Thy mother is gone from thee,’ said the voice, ‘outworn by thine evil ways. Thou didst choose to have thyself and not thy mother, and there thou hast thyself, and she is gone. I only am left to care for thee — not with kisses and sweet words, but with a dungeon. Unawares to thyself thou hast forged thine own chains, and riveted them upon thy limbs. Not Hercules could free thee or himself from such imprisonment.’

“The man burst out weeping, and cried with sobs :—

“‘What then am I to do, for the burden of them is intolerable ?’

“‘What I will tell thee,’ said the voice; ‘for so shall thy chains fall from thee.’

“‘I will do it,’ said the man.

“‘Thy prison is foul,’ said the voice.

“‘It is,’ answered the prisoner.

“‘Cleanse it, then.’

“‘How can I cleanse it when I cannot move?’

“‘Cannot move! Thy hands were upon thy face a moment gone—and now they are upon the floor! Near one of those hands lies a dead mouse; yonder is an open window. Cast the dead thing out into the furnace of life, that it may speedily make an end thereof.’

“With sudden obedient resolve the prisoner made the endeavour to reach it. The chain pulled the collar hard, and the manacle wrenched his wrist; but he caught the dead thing by the tail, and with a fierce effort threw it; out of the window it flew and fell—and the air of his dungeon seemed already clearer.

“After a silence, came the voice again:—

“‘Behind thee lies a broom,’ it said; ‘reach forth and take it, and sweep around thee as far as thy chains will yield thee scope.’

“The man obeyed, and, as he swept, at every stroke he reached farther. At length,—how it came he could not tell, for his chains hung heavy upon him still,—he found himself sweeping the very foot of the walls.

“A moment more, and he stood at the open window, looking out into the world. A dove perched upon the window-sill, and walked inquiringly in; he caught it in his hands, and looked how to close the window, that he might secure its company. Then came the voice:—

“‘Wilt thou, a prisoner, make of thyself a jailer?’

“He opened his hands, and the dove darted into the sun-

light. There it fluttered and flashed for a moment, like a bird of snow; then re-entered, and flew into his very hands. He stroked and kissed it. The bird went and came, and was his companion.

"Still, his chains hung about him, and he sighed and groaned under their weight.

"‘Set thee down,’ said the voice, ‘and polish thine irons.’

"He obeyed, rubbing link against link busily with his hands. And thus he laboured—as it seemed to the boy in the vision—day after day, until at last every portion within his reach, of fetter, and chain, and collar, glittered with brightness.

"‘Go to the window,’ then said the voice, ‘and lay thee down in the sunshine.’

"He went and lay down, and fell asleep. When he awoke, he began to raise himself heavily; but, lo! the sun had melted all the burnished parts of his bonds, the rest dropped from him, and he sprang to his feet. For very joy of lightness, he ran about the room like a frolicking child. Then said the voice once more:—

"‘Now carve thee out of the wall the figure of a man, as perfect as thou canst think and make it.’

"‘Alas!’ said the prisoner to himself, ‘I know not how to carve or fashion the image of anything.’

"But as he said it, he turned with a sigh to find among the fragments of his fetters what piece of iron might best serve him for a chisel. To work he set, and many and weary were the hours he wrought, for his attempts appeared to him nothing better than those of a child, and again and ever again as he carved, he had to change his purpose, and cut away what he had carved; for the thing he wrought would not conform itself to the thing he thought, and it seemed he made no progress in the task that was set him. But he did not know that it was because

his thought was not good enough to give strength and skill to his hand,—that it seemed too good for his hand to follow.

“One night he wrought hard by the glimmer of his wretched lamp, until, overwearied, he fell fast asleep, and slept like one dead. When he awoke, lo ! a man of light, lovely and grand, who stood where he had been so wearily carving the unresponsive stone ! He rose and drew nigh. Behold, it was an opening in the wall, through which his freedom shone ! The man of light was the door into the universe. And he darted through the wall.

“As he vanished from his sight, the boy felt the wind of the morning lave his forehead ; but with the prisoner vanished the vision ; he was alone, with the moon shining through the windows. Too solemn to be afraid, he crept back to his bed, and fell fast asleep.

“In the morning, he knew there had come to him what he now took for a strange dream, but he remembered little of it, and thought less about it, and the same day the wizard took him home.

“His mother was out when he arrived, and he had not been in five minutes before it began to rain. It was holiday-time, and there were no lessons, and the school-room looked dismal as a new street. He had not a single companion, and the rain came down with slow persistence. He tried to read, but could not find any enjoyment in it. His thoughts grew more and more gloomy, until at last his very soul was disquieted within him. When his mother came home and sought him in the school-room, she found him lying on the floor, sullen and unkind. Although he knew her step as she entered, he never looked up ; and when she spoke to him, he answered like one aggrieved.

“‘I am sorry you are unhappy,’ said his mother, sweetly.

‘I did not know you were to be home to-day. Come with me to my room.’

“He answered his mother insolently:—

“‘I don’t want to go with you. I only want to be left alone.’

“His mother turned away, and, without another word, left the room.

“The cat came in, went up to him purring, and rubbed herself against him. He gave her such a blow that she flew out again, in angry fright, with her back high above her head. And the rain rained faster, and the wind began to blow, and the misery settled down upon his soul like lead. At last he wept with his face on the floor, quite overmastered by the most contemptible of all passions—self-pity.

“Again the voice of his mother came to him. The wizard had in the meantime come to see her, and had just left her.

“‘Get up, my boy,’ she said, in a more commanding tone than he had ever heard from her before.

“With her words the vision returned upon him, clear, and plain, and strong. He started in terror, almost expecting to hear the chains rattle about him.

“‘Get up, and make the room tidy. See how you have thrown the books about!’ said his mother.

“He dared not disobey her. He sprang to his feet, and as he reduced the little chaos around him to order, first calmness descended, and then shame arose. As he fulfilled her word, his mother stood and looked on. The moment he had finished, he ran to her, threw his arms about her neck, burst into honest, worthy tears, and cried:—

“‘Mother!’

“Then, after a while, he sobbed out:—

“‘I am sorry I was so cross and rude to my mother.

"She kissed him, and put her arms around him, and with his mind's eye he saw the flap of the white dove's wing. She took him by the hand and led him to the window. The sun was shining, and a grand rainbow stood against the black curtain of the receding cataract.

"'Come, my child,' she said; 'we will go out together.'

"It was long years ere the boy understood *all* the meanings of the vision. I doubt if he understands them all yet. But he will one day. And I can say no more for the wisest of the readers, or for the writer himself, of this parable.'"

A few remarks followed, some of which were much to the point, Mrs. Bloomfield said:—

"As we may never have another opportunity, husband, I should like you to read, if the company has not already had enough, those two little sketches of travels you wrote for the *Everyday Outlook*. They can't have seen them."

We all joined in the request, and the schoolmaster having found them, said:—

"I need not tell you the circumstances in which I learned the matter of the narratives, the papers will explain themselves sufficiently. The first is called

"AN INVALID'S WINTER."

"Waking, as I supposed, from one of those short troubled sleeps which chequer the monotony of the less violent forms of sea-sickness, I heard, to my great delight, the bell at the wheel announce a far more advanced hour of the morning than I could have hoped. Already the cool light was penetrating the thick glass in the port-hole of my cabin. I rose, and slowly crept on deck. It was as if the bitterness of death were past, and I had awaked in the new world. From the narrow grave of my birth, filled with a close atmosphere, and haunted by un-

pleasant noises and motions, I came forth in the midst of the wide sea and sky. Through the crowds of French soldiers and other passengers, I elbowed my way to the wheel, and there finding an open space, I looked around me. Speedily sped the vessel southwards, away from the cold winds and frosts of a northern winter, whose advanced guard had overtaken us on our way, and kept us for days imprisoned. But now we had escaped. And the sun would soon rise, and by the time he should have reached the zenith we hoped to be at anchor in the port of Algiers. This morning was a new vision to me. Over us hung, or rather stooped, the sky of the south, a deep violet, with much of the red in it; wherein the stars sparkled with a keen steely lustre, like spangles cut from sword-blades. Underneath flowed the sea, with great dashes of purple upon a slate blue, that swept, and rolled, and floated away to the east; where the sky-sea, barred with orange and yellow, told that the sun was near. Two or three sea-birds were following close behind us; and suddenly through the waves came a troop of porpoises, rushing along with wondrous speed; shooting out of one wave, and plunging headlong into the next; gambolling, and coursing, and bounding, as if trying their *wind* against the steamer, and easily able to pass her if they chose. I thought what a delicious life they had of it in the waves, with their cool slippery sides, that were always wet; and how they felt as much at home in the water as we in the air, knowing it was their only element. And then I began to pity them that they had only the Mediterranean to swim in, and were so unlikely ever to find the way out into the great world-sea. But I knew that this was only the longing for freedom in me, which can never be stilled by limitless room, but must find the boundless in another region than that of space and time.

“At length the hills arose and drew near. Ere long we saw the white city built up the face of one of the low range—the

Sahel that guards the coast ; from the summits of which the pirates used to search the face of the sea for the white-winged game, that so often fled in vain before the swift hunters of the waves. Soon we were in the midst of swarthy visages and glowing eyes, that might well belong to the descendants of these terrible men ; and ere long, we were guided by one of them to a hotel in the principal *place* of the town, where, by-and-by, we contrived to forget the horrors of the steamer in the less, but not less real, horrors which mingle with the comforts of a French hotel.

“ It was the end of November ; yet, invalid as I was, I dressed next morning with the window open. The day was so glowing, the air so clear, and the colours of sea, and earth, and sky were so intense, that the whole scene looked like one of those pictures one does not believe in. Across the still blue bay, we saw the purple hills which continue the range on which the city is built ; and beyond them rose in the distance blue mountains with snowy summits ; around which we could see the tops of lower hills crouching like lions at their feet. Above all spread the cloudless blue. The square on which my window looked, and which, open on one side, revealed the scene of which I write, was crowded with a bewildering variety of the most brilliant costumes. The splendid dresses of Moors and Jews mingled with the numberless varieties of the uniforms of French soldiers ; while the rainbow mass was relieved by the graceful simplicity of the Arab bernouse, and the mournful white of the shrouded Moorish women, who seemed already half buried from life and clothed in the garments of the grave—where, even if the spirit lingered by the mouldering form, they could scarce feel less lonely and hopeless than they at least appear to the eyes of the English stranger. The whole was filled with military noises ; in which the kettle-drum, with its terrier-like alarum, took a foremost part, and soon wearied us

with its regularly recurring noisy monotony. Indeed, we were very soon sick of the tumult, indoors and out, and longed for the seclusion of the country.

“From the sea, the outline of the city, lying on the slope of the hill, somewhat resembles in form one of the Moorish horse-shoe arches, but bent outwards considerably at the heel ; expanding, that is, when it reaches the more level ground at the base of the hill. The whole mass is of a dazzling whiteness, resembling the escarpment of a chalk hill ; for twice a-year they whitewash the whole of their houses outside and inside, to protect themselves from the heat, though thereby they expose themselves the more to the injurious effects of the light. Some of the principal streets, where the mortifying hand of the conquerors has been at work, are entirely French in their appearance ; but as soon as you turn southwards, and commence to climb one of the streets which lead up the hill, you find yourself in an entirely novel environment ; wandering in the labyrinth an apparently endless accumulation of narrow streets, and stairs, and passages, and archways, shooting off in all directions ; some ascending towards the sunlight as you hope ; others appearing to dive into the earth ; all narrow, many so narrow that a little person could easily touch both sides at once ; many arched over, and many roofed in by the contact of the projecting upper stories of the houses on opposite sides. The design is to exclude the sun in all ways. The rubbish can only be removed on the backs of donkeys, of which you may often meet a troop in your way emerging from what seems the entrance to a splendid mansion, or jolting along a squalid lane three or four feet wide. But, although the streets are so narrow, it must not be supposed that the town is therefore as ill aired as, with such appearances, an English one would be justly supposed to be. For inside every house—whose heavy door looks like that of a prison—in these narrow passages, is

a square court open to the heavens, so that 'each has its own patch of sky, and little lot of stars.' Along these streets I much enjoyed wandering. Some of them are full of workshops, little rooms, or scarcely more than closets, open to the street, above which they are sometimes raised a few feet. In these the various trades go on—tailoring, shoemaking, turning, tobacco-cutting, and others. Conversations might easily be carried on across the streets between the different artizans. I used sometimes to stand and watch them at their work, and generally saw something to interest me. One time it was the extraordinary development and use of the great toe, supplying the place of a thumb on the turning lathe, one hand being employed to turn the lathe with a bow ; while the operator sat on the floor on a level with his machine. Another time it was the covering of a button with a network of silk, or a stitch new to me in shoemaking ; or the moulding of red clay pipes ; or the scraping of the shell of a clumsy musical instrument, which looked like a dropsical guitar. But I had not much opportunity for making acquaintance with these streets ; for, after many failures, we at length succeeded in finding an *appartement* in a large Moorish house, belonging to a French officer, at the distance of two miles from the city ; and here we settled down for the winter, exulting in the hope of privacy and leisure, with an open silence all around us, wherein the soul might feel that the whole external world is (as Schleiermacher says) the extension of the human body, and might flow forth and occupy its dwelling without hindrance from contact with uncongenial forms. The room in which we sat had a low groined roof, with vaulted recesses on one side, in one of which we soon contrived to put a French piano, and on a cheffonier in the other a statuette of the Venus of Milo ; finding thus some relief to the picturesque dulness of the room. The floor was paved with coloured tiles, rising a couple of feet up the walls ;

and the entire absence of red in any combination prevented these tiles from continuing to please me much. Then the room was disfigured by a huge French stove in one of the small windows, which, when it became necessary to use it, added much to our discomfort by smoking. But through our little windows we saw the Mediterranean at a furlong's distance ; and when its sunny face drew us out to the little terrace at the top of the entrance stair, we were in the midst of a glowing world ; the great hills in the distance, like an infinite hope, and the air filled with the odours of citron and orange-blossoms. Here our days passed quietly. For some time the weather was warm enough to sit reading out of doors upon the rocky cliffs by the tideless sea ; on which, when you looked up from your book, you might see the boats of the country, with their elegant three-cornered latteen sails on the long slanting yard, bounding before a breeze from the west, when the white water is coming out of the black, as my little girl said ; or in one of those cloudy days, which were comparatively rare there, you might see these boats dreaming along over a floor of delicate silver-grey, turning up ever as they broke the surface, and leaving behind them a track of brilliant intense blue, corresponding to a belt of the same colour that circled the edge of the far horizon. Or, if the sun had gone behind the hills, and sea and sky built up one cavern of calm blue, you might catch the rosy glow of a single sail which alone, in the midst of the prevailing blue, reflected the sunset red. But over all, I think the colours of this new land affected me most. Yet there were no gorgeous sunsets, such as in our England, to crown earthly vapours with unearthly glory. The sky was too clear for those. The hills lying immediately behind us prevented our seeing the actual sunset, whereof the only noticeable sign in middle air might be a pale pink vapour, in the centre of which might sparkle one diamond star. Nor was there any

common grass. No fields with thick carpets of green, wherein even the foot has its own sensuous joy, and whereon you may cast yourself down in silence when the love of the earth becomes too strong for happiness. Only once did the feeling of earth's homeliness enter my soul. It was an early spring night. A heavy dew falls at sundown, but after that it is often warm and dry. We had just left the house of some Scotch friends, who, like ourselves, had spent the winter there, and who long ere this had become dear to us. It was a night of stars. Venus was going down in the west in a triumph of glory, flashing red, and green, and blue, like a sea-beacon, through the refracting strata of the lower atmosphere. The whole night-vault was filled with the roarings of the waves which a wind, since dead, had aroused, and driven landward to rave on the rocky shore. And suddenly to my soul came a scent of earth, of damp spring earth, an odour well known from childhood, which calls up thoughts of love and the grave, and mingles with either kind, for they are not far apart. Then I recognized the common mother; knew that England and Africa were of the same earth, and rejoiced that she bore me.

"But with the new year a stormy time began. For many, many weeks there was more or less rain every day, sometimes, but rarely, continuous for two or three days, accompanied by violent storms of wind and lightning. Then we could go out but little. We read, or sat and gazed through our tiny windows on the turmoil of the sea. Far out from the shore reached the white chaos of the breakers. In mingling shades of green, and yellow, and white, barred and patched with the purple shadows of the clouds, the sea tossed and foamed beneath the wind, which tore the glassy tops of the billows into hair-like spray. During this season you might sometimes see fine masses of cloud, but seldom such as, during thunderous weather, may be seen, like grotesque masses of half-finished sculpture, piled in Titanic

confusion and magnificence around our sky. The rain falls like a cataract. Once I saw the finest rainbow I have ever seen. It planted one end of its arch close beside us, between us and the sea, and rose aloft and stretched away the other where we could not see it for the heights around us. I never saw one come so near. It would have been easy to find the golden key at its foot this time. But what struck me most was the intensity of its chords of thick colour. A second larger arc appeared beyond it; but its root was planted far out in the sea, and its hues were thin, and vague, and ghostly beside the glow of the nearer.

“With the night came often the lightning and the thunder. It was so dark without, that to us looking from within the windows appeared solid as the walls. When suddenly a sea and sky immense asserted themselves with an instantaneous illumination of existence in the soul, flashing themselves in through the narrow windows—for a small opening admits a great space—then darkness followed, rent and billowed by the thunder. Such a stormy winter had not been known by any of the French inhabitants.

“Now and then I took a few hours’ ride in the surrounding country, among the low hills which crowd the coast. As there are but few large trees, and at this season little vegetation, the country has in many parts rather a bare look, but in the gorges between the hills there are many bushes and small trees. The most striking plants are the prickly-pear cactus and the aloë. This cactus forms a defence around and throughout the Arab villages. But what seemed to interest me most was the Arab cemeteries. One of the largest of these lay on the top and seaward slope of a hill, from which the inhabitants of the near village, a noted nest of pirates, used to search the sea for their prey. Of this village only miserable huts remain amidst the ruins of Moorish houses. The numberless graves with their

tiny vertical stones lie broad and bare to the sea and the sky ; unlike the greater number of their churchyards, which lie in groves of olives and other trees. Suddenly, when riding along a narrow bridle-path you find yourself in the midst of one of these chambers of the dead ; and looking back you see perhaps that for some little way you have been riding through graves, crowded among the roots of the trees. Over the resting-places of their chief men they build small mosques, or, in some cases, mere low-roofed huts ; but better than many of the dwellings of the living. I entered one of these, and found the floor filled with tombs, one apparently very old ; and one or two in the usual form of the more elaborate tombs of the country, with a high ornamented stone at the head and feet, connected by two long side stones, across which were little shelves with hollows for water, and I think flowers. Some earthen lamps stood on the old tomb ; and babies' graves were near the door. It was a solemn place. The light through the rents in the walls or roof fell in faint brown patches on the earthen floor. This and that which entered by the low ever open door was the sole sombre illumination of the place, which had a cathedral stillness and sacredness about it, mingled with that feeling of faint desolation which in every land and under every form the forsaken graves of men and women awake in the heart.

“ But oftener I went into the city, never tired of looking at the varied human forms that met me on my way. One cannot help wondering, when he sees the little, jerky, self-asserting, tight-laced Frenchman, beside the stately, dignified, reserved, loose-robed Arab, how the former could ever assume and retain authority over the latter. I have seen a power of contempt and repressed indignation in the half-sidelong look with which an Arab in a ragged bernouse regarded a Frenchman who had tapped him on the shoulder with a stick to attract his attention.

There is something in the bearing and manners of the Arab significant, whether truly or not, of a personal dignity far beyond that common to the German, or French, or English. Two of them came once to our residence to remove our piano before we left. A great proportion of the heavy carriage in Algiers is done by the Arabs slinging the weight on a pole which rests on their shoulders. Our breakfast being still on the table, I asked them to sit down and have some coffee; which they did without the least embarrassment, half-lounging on their chairs, and chatting away in bad French, aided by gesture, with a thoroughbred ease rarely to be seen in our own country. I was proud of them. Their religion teaches them that in the sight of God they are all equal, and they seem to believe it, more at least than Christians do; and this combined with their fatalism, which naturally destroys all haste and perturbation, produces an indifferent stateliness of demeanour which many a man of Norman blood and fabulous origin might well envy. One or two of them whom I came to know a little, used always to shake hands with me after the English fashion. Indeed, they seem to like the English much. *Inglese bono* are frequently the first words you hear from their lips. Some English ladies we knew had favour shown them to the degree of being permitted to enter the mosques without putting off their shoes, being only required to wipe them very carefully on a mat brought them for the purpose. I was amused at being recognized in the streets as an Englishman, because I was partly dressed in the Highland costume. But, indeed, the Highlander is the type of the English soldier with them. This notion the native African troops have brought back with them from the Crimea. Once I was standing in the principal market-place, when one of a little group of French and Maltese about me touched me and pointed to the sign of a *cabaret* opposite, upon which appeared a Highlander and a Zouave, fraternizing hand

in hand. They seemed desirous I should acknowledge the relationship.

“There are many negroes amongst the inhabitants of Algiers ; the young remarkable, if rarely for beauty of features, yet often for the fine formation of the limbs, and for delicacy in the texture of the skin. The old, on the contrary, both in feature and limb, are something frightful. I feel almost guilty of inhumanity in writing it ; yet so they affected me. Some of the Jews likewise present as exaggerated forms of the features peculiar to their race as caricature could desire ; while the Jewesses are almost invariably unpleasant-looking. In Tangiers, on the contrary, where there is a mixture of Spanish blood in the race, the Jews are, I am informed, a very fine people. But in Algiers, from being constantly treated with all the distinctions of a separate and inferior race, they seem to have degenerated. To return to the negroes. From the fact that the Moors do not permit their young women to go to the mosque, and, therefore, that their religious necessities are left unsupplied, some of the negresses have attained great influence over the Moorish women ; seeming, indeed, to occupy the position of priestesses between them and some good or bad power which they attempt either to propitiate or disarm by barbarous ceremonies. At certain wells on the coast negresses meet one day in every week, to sacrifice fowls and perform other rites. To these assemblies some of the Moorish women repair, to have their faces laved in the holy water, and be fumigated by the negresses with incense. But on frequent occasions they assemble in an appointed house ; that is, in the central open court of one of the Moorish dwellings, and any one may easily gain admittance. At one of these I was present, but I should not choose to go again ; it left such an impression of doleful, uninteresting horror. Nor were the performances at all such as to be worth describing. They consisted chiefly

of intense bewildering noise from half a dozen drums, as many iron castanets, and some other instruments, accompanied at times with a most peculiar shrill whistle, resembling that of a steam-engine, from one or other of the negresses, with which they used to excite others to join in the second principal part of the performance—namely, a kind of frantic and degrading dance, in which at one time they threw themselves heels over head on the ground, and at another crawled backwards, beating time with their hands on the paved floor ; or again, belaboured themselves with ropes, and pretended to stab themselves with knives. Whenever any one seemed going too far, or likely to injure himself, another patted him on the back, and at once brought him to his senses. At length, however, one or two were carried away senseless. This kind of performance, I understand, is usually kept up to a late hour ; and in many cases, when the excitement reaches its height, marvellous tricks of jugglery are said to be performed, though I witnessed none of these myself that were at all wonderful. But the solemnity of the countenances of the performers, and the appearance of earnestness in their work, while it had something ludicrous in it, I yet found impressive and affecting. May it not be, I thought, that even in this there are the first rudiments of the expression of an unknown need ? an inward prayer, that is yet so undefined as to take no embodiment in articulate sound, but utters itself in howls and artificial noises ? These too are the children of the one Father, and there may be even in these orgies something of prayer that reaches the ear that listens not for the form of the words, but the utterance of the need. And I could not help collating these barbarities with some forms of Christian worship, good enough in themselves, but which when exalted into the place of essential duty, seemed to me equally senseless with these half animal utterances, and far more provoking, as being forced on the attention by persons

whose appearance and development in other things seem to justify the expectation of something much farther beyond their negro brothers and sisters. At these exhibitions many Moorish women are present, but they take no other share in the performances than receiving every now and then what seems a benediction, in the form of being twisted by the shoulders from one side to the other and back, accompanied by other manipulations from the negresses; and inhaling now and then the odours of the fumigations proceeding from an earthen sherd with live charcoal, on which incense is sprinkled, and held under their faces.

“Very different in purport and effect is the worship of the Mohammedans, to whom, however, the negroes belong, at least in name, although the remnants of old superstitions yet retain a power over them. One fine moonlight night, during the fast of Ramadan, my wife and I set out to walk to the town, that we might see the principal mosque lighted up for worship. Such good order is preserved under the rule of the French, and such is the quiet behaviour of the inhabitants generally, that we were far safer in doing so than we should have been in the neighbourhood of any large town in our own country. The streets were beginning to be deserted as we went through. After passing along a blank wall, within a colonnade in one of the principal streets, for some distance, a gloomy looking door in it, on being pushed open, admitted us into a kind of piazza, which ran round three sides of an open court. In this passage a fountain stood for the frequent washing enjoined by their law. The fourth side of the quadrangle was formed by the open arches of the roofed part of the mosque, which inner part seemed a much larger quadrangle than the outer, and was all divided into small square portions, by lines of pillars and arches, intersecting each other at right angles. The arches running in one direction

were all plain, those crossing them ornamented by having the under side cut into many little arches. Along every avenue of pillars, running from the entrance inwards, was suspended a row of oil lamps, consisting of glass basins with floating wicks. These rows, when approaching the opposite wall, began to ascend, and the lamps were carried gradually up the wall a short way, so as to give the appearance of a long perspective of lights. There were very few worshippers present, and these scattered in little groups throughout the building, but mostly at the upper end, where we heard the low tones of the priest's voice, in listening to which the worshippers now stood, now kneeled, and now bowed low with their foreheads to the ground. Once or twice a Moor, who seemed to have some charge in the observances, waved us away with dignity when he saw us ; but we moved to a different part of the building, and had no other interruption to our curiosity. But the most picturesque point of view was the exterior court. Here, the moon shone clear into the court, her light falling upon a large tree in the centre, around which clung the stem of a great vine. As we looked up we saw one of the towers of the mosque rising high above us into the night, with the faint glitter of the moonlight on the glazed tiles which ornamented it near the top, around which was disposed a coronal of dull lamps, like those in the mosque below, and which showed reddish in the pale moon-shine. Then on the other side opened the wide, strong arches, with the long rows of lamps stretching far into the distance of the mosque.

“Stormy as the season was, the common red geranium had been in blossom in the hedges all the winter through. We had never been quite without flowers ; but now, as the spring came on, the new children of the year began to arrive. I am no botanist, and my knowledge of the flowers is like my knowledge of the human kind. I have a few friends, a good many

acquaintances—of some of whom I should be glad to be rid—and a vast multitude pass before my eyes whom I have not yet learned to like or dislike. Now, sometimes I come gradually to know and value a flower for what it is ; sometimes I love one for the sake of its friends ; sometimes I fall in love with one all at once for itself, with a love that never leaves me. It was a mingling of the latter two of these loves that arose in me when I saw first the splendid blue pimpernel of this country. I had been intimately acquainted with its red cousin in England ; and that feeling blended with the new love for the blue one. It grows to a great size on the sides of the hills facing the sea ; that is, the largest are as large as a small primrose. They grow in great multitudes, and are of a deep, *burning* blue, as an artist friend styled it. A slender, snaky, curled grass, that crept along the ground on the tops of the cliffs above the sea, and moved me with some feeling of repugnance, came out in the spring a delicate little blue iris. Indeed, the iris is a common flower here in all colours. A kind of asphodel is common in the fields ; and the marigolds and lupins are likewise in great quantities. The varieties of grasses are very strange and beautiful. The cactus flowers had only just begun to appear before we left ; but the acacia blossoms were wondrously rich and lovely, and filled the air around our dwelling with their odours. For ten acacia-trees stood on a terrace by our door ; and pleasant it was, with the brilliant moon overhead, leaning down towards the earth, to walk on this terrace, looking out over the Mediterranean, and hearing the low talk of the sea and the shore, each a mystery to the other, sounding on far below.

“When the warmer weather arrived, I ventured inland as far as the town of Medéah, which lies high among the mountains. Two ladies and myself formed the party ; and, seated in the *banquette* of the *diligence*, travelled with much enjoyment, first

through the plain of the Metidja to Blidah, and next through the gorge of the Chiffah to Medéah. The day after our arrival in Blidah we strolled out through the town, and soon found ourselves in the market-place. Here one of my companions seated herself on a sack of corn, and commenced sketching some of the Arabs present. We left her surrounded by a group of twenty or thirty Arabs, one of whom, grinning with amusement, was half-leaning, half-lying, over another full sack, and presenting his handsome face for the exercise of her skill. In submitting without repugnance to this operation, these Arabs differed very much from those in Algiers, who would rarely, from religious scruples (representations of the human form being condemned by their prophet), allow their portraits to be taken. Indeed, the same lady had, on one occasion at least, caused the sudden dispersion of a group assembled round a café, by proceeding to sketch it from the opposite side of the street. They hurried on their shoes, rose from their varied postures, and escaped as from an evil eye. Here the men appeared more free, but the women, in one particular at least, less so. For, whereas in Algiers all the Moorish women show both eyes, in the interior the Arab women gather the haik around the whole face except one eye, which you cannot see from the accumulated shade around it. You are hereby delivered, at least, from the sad expression of eyes which, whether from the effect of the setting of white, or from the mystery of concealment, appear invariably beautiful. These eyes are always dark ; for, although I have seen blue eyes, on more than one occasion, shining out from these veiled faces, I was assured they must belong to women of Turkish, and not Arab descent. How strange some of our fair Saxon women would look in the streets of Algiers ! for the French women are generally dark too. But the dress of the country women is very inferior, of course, to that of those living in the towns.

Though when in the street the latter are dressed entirely in white, you can see through their thin upper garments the shining of their gold and blue or red girdles ; and the garments are so white that they look ghostly. If you were to see one at the end of a deep narrow passage, emerging from a yet deeper gloom behind, especially if at night, and in the moonshine, you would think of a wandering ghost, or the raising of the sheeted dead. But in the country they seem to dress in the same kind of woollen stuff that the men wear. To return, however, to the morning in question. My other companion and I went outside one of the gates of the town, and seated ourselves on the grass. She commenced sketching, and I began to write a note. A little group soon gathered round us, of which two or three were native soldiers in the French army. With one of these, a fine-looking young fellow, who had been in the Crimea, I soon made friends, by asking him to give me a cigarette ; the most common way of smoking tobacco here, out of doors, being to twist up a little in paper prepared for the purpose. He granted my petition with the greatest alacrity ; and, having prepared the cigarette, proceeded, by inserting a corner of his handkerchief, which had no hem on it, in one of his percussion caps, and scratching the powder at the bottom with the picker of his musket, to get me a light. He asserted the brotherhood of the English and the Africans, by laying his two forefingers together, and saying in French that they were all the same. I managed to have a little talk with him in French ; after which we exchanged two small coins *in memoriam*, and he presented me with a Turkish one in addition. He then left me, but soon returned, bringing a beautiful bunch of roses, dripping with water, which he gave me. Something within me said, and says yet, we shall meet again.

“When we rejoined our companion, whom we left in the market, she told us that after she had finished her sketching, and

was going away, one of the Arabs ran after her, and offered her three sous. She asked one who understood French what he meant by it. He said it was to get a cup of coffee with. Their own women have no money, and he had supposed the English women have none either, and wished to show her this hospitality.

“The gorge of the Chiffah is threaded by a fine road, one of the many the French have made in Algeria, running along the sides of the mountains, often at a considerable height above the bed of the river. Along the most difficult part of this road, with no parapet on the precipitous descent, and with very abrupt turns, we were driven by a heavy-browed, sullen-faced Moor, the only Moor I remember to have seen driving. To his muscular arm the seven horses he had in hand seemed no more than his four to one of our English coachmen. This part of the journey was very fine ; especially one portion, which was crowded on both sides of the ravine with waterfalls of every kind. One of these was very peculiar. It appeared to come right out of the face of the precipice, and after running a little way down, again disappeared, as if it had run back into the rock from which it had sprung. Lovely ferns grew on the sides of the rocks, constantly splashed, and dripping with the clear water that ran from above. Though I dislike minute descriptions of scenery, and desire, with Jean Paul, that my friend should have the power of seeing Nature in large masses, yet sometimes the most intense enjoyment flows from no more than a cubic foot of the earth’s bulk. I remember one little insignificant hollow, built of rough stones, and roofed over with a stone, inside which tumbled and gurgled and murmured and glided (I wish I might use the preterite, *glode*) adown the three feet of its height, a plenteous little cataract of clear, willing water ; and all the sides of the tiny cavern were draped and purpled and waved with the maiden-hair fern, with its black stalks and

trembling leaflets. But no descriptive arrangement of scenery is of much use. A single unexpected flash of words may now and then throw a real feeling of the scenery on the mind ; but the imagination generally outrunning the intellectual reception of a description, arranges at its will the component elements of the scene, which afterwards refuse to be displaced, even when the mind is better informed. Indeed, a composition painted to express the general feeling produced in the artist's mind by any landscape, may do more to give a real impression of the nature of a country, in its relation to the higher elements of our being, than the most laborious portrait of real scenes in it, indispensable as these are to a perfect understanding of the whole ; because the state of minute observation, the tension of the mind in attending, is inimical to those influences of the whole, which need for their perfection a lake-like calmness and passiveness of the spirit.

"It seemed to me noticeable that, both on my companions and myself, the hot south wind from the desert, which prevailed during our short stay at Medéah, produced effects similar to those occasioned by a cold east wind at home.

"At length the time came for our return to green grass, and large trees, and grey skies, and the increasing turmoil of confused and confusing progress. On a bright African noon we embarked on board a French steamer for Marseilles. I must mention one man, whose acquaintance I made for the short time it took to cross the Mediterranean, and pass the custom-house at Marseilles. We happened to be seated beside each other at the *table-d'hôte* of the steamer. I was struck with his Scotch look, and so were others on board. He had nothing of French about him to the eye, only the ear recognized him as a Frenchman. His motions were British, and he even spoke French with more deliberation than his countrymen. But he

spoke English well, though he had never been in England, and had only commenced learning it when at the age of forty-five. He was now sixty-three. I asked him if he had read Tennyson. He said he had not, though he had his works on his book-shelves. 'My name,' said he, 'is Tennéson, only spelled with an *e* instead of a *y*. My grandfather used to tell me that we are of Scotch descent, and that our family came over to France with James the Second.' A most benevolent old man he seemed, attentive and kind to everybody. I happened to express a hope that they would not detain us long at the custom-house, else we should lose the train we wished to go by; which was of some consequence to me, as my purse was nearly empty, and I could not get it replenished before reaching Paris. He said, 'I shall be happy to lend you some; make yourself quite easy about that.' And this, though our routes diverged as soon as we reached our port; and I do not know that he even knew my name. He helped us through the custom-house, got a carriage for us, and sent us away with kindness. His benevolence had a happy combination of Scotch solidity and French politeness.

"And now we hastened northward towards our own island; and the skies rose higher, and the stars were paler, and further apart, and more of mystery brooded in the wastes of heaven. For we drew nearer to that region of the north where the old hero, weary that the skies rested on the earth, pushed them aloft, that men might have room to live and labour. And so more of mystery in the aspect of the heavenly deeps dwells above the heads of the men who toil and struggle, than over the more noble forms of those who lead an incurious and easy life, waiting only for what will come, and never asking what it may be. And if the more busy and earnest had purer faith in the Father of all, a yet nobler and more dignified repose would pervade the spirit; and, working outwards, impart to the

visible form a greater majesty of composure than that produced by the unquestioning fatalism of the Arab."

After this came a pause and some remarks, and when they seemed over, the schoolmaster resumed.

"The next you will find is not written in my own person. I am afraid you will not care for it, but here it is.

"A JOURNEY REJOURNEYED.

"My name is Jane. At least that is what I choose to call myself. I want to tell anybody who will listen, what a friend of our family, James Bayley—that is what I choose to call him—told us. I think people will care for it, because it made my sister Lizzie sleep all night with a smile on the face which constant pain makes so white.

"There is something very wonderful about James Bayley. Some ancestor of his must have been a magician or necromancer, or something of that sort ; for with a few words, flung out anyhow, nothing grand in them, he can make you see such things ! Oh ! I can never tell them so that you will see them as I saw them ; yet I must try. And I know that Lizzie saw them yet more beautiful than I did ; for as often as I glanced at her while James was speaking, I saw her face yet more beautiful than the visions his words were raising in my mind. I saw those visions as it were glorified in her countenance. What a pity it is that his words must be withered and shrunk like fallen leaves, by being blown and tossed about in my mind !

"But I must explain a little further.

"We are a poor family. Even in these days of running to and fro, we cannot manage to leave home, at least not often, and never to a greater distance than Hastings. Brighton none of us like. It seems all made of hard sunlight. But what

a shame it is to abuse Brighton, instead of going on to tell you about James Bayley ! First, however, I have not quite finished about ourselves. My father was a doctor. I don't think there ever was such a man as my father. Only James Bayley is very like him—in mind and character, I mean. Well, my father died young. So he could not leave much money for us. And yet we were very anxious, both for my mother's sake and for dear Lizzie's, not to leave the old house. So my sister Maria and I go out and give lessons. It is hard work, to be sure ; but then think what it is to be able to come home to our own house, and our own mother, and our own Lizzie ! When I am tramping through the wet in a day like this, with goloshes and an umbrella, thinking of the dreary two hours I shall have to spend with the Miss Drontheims—not dreary because I have to teach, but dreary because I have to teach *them*—I say to myself, 'This is one of my dreams, in which I go tramping and teaching ; but I shall wake in my own home with the tea-kettle singing on the hob, and the firelight playing on the curtains of Lizzie's bed. Think of that, Jane,' I say to myself, 'and do your work as well as ever you can, that you may wake with a good conscience.'

"I wonder now if this is how people make books, wandering this way and that way, instead of going right on to the thing they want to say. Perhaps, if they went straight, however, they would reach the end before they had made the book, and that wouldn't do. But for me, who am only writing a short—short—essay ? paper ? article ?—article, that's it—indefinite article, that's better—in the hope that some kind editor may think it not quite bad enough for his waste-paper-basket, it is really too bad to go on in this way.

"James Bayley is a clerk in a bank. His father and mine were great friends. I am afraid there are not many clerks like James. Do you know he actually *reads* books ? Now *I try*

to read books ; but I know very few people who really do read them. I hardly know whether I do or not. I am sure he does.

“James is no richer than we are ; and he too has been very little from home. But this summer, an old maiden aunt left him thirty pounds in her will—to go, as she said, into mourning for her. But James said he thought it better to go into gladness for her ; and so, when he got his holiday, he went to Switzerland, and thanked God on the top of the Sneezer—I think that is what he called it—that he had come of honest people, and that his aunt had been kind enough to make him a present of the Bernese Alps, which he would keep in memory of her to all eternity. “Rather better than a suit of black and a mourning ring, isn’t it, dear old auntie?’ he said.

“And the very first night after he came home, as soon as he had had his dinner, he came on to see us. And didn’t Lizzie’s face brighten up when he came into the room? Indeed, she raised herself higher against her pillows than she had done for the last five years. For mamma, who was in the dining-room, had received him, and said that we were just going to have tea in poor Lizzie’s room, and would he mind coming up there, for it would be like a breath of wind to the poor invalid to see such a far-travelled man as James? As if James hadn’t been in Lizzie’s room a hundred times before ! Of course nothing could please him better, and so up he came. And, as I said, she *was* glad to see him, and we had tea by the fire, and, as a special privilege, because he was a stranger, James was permitted to wait upon Lizzie.

“When Sarah had taken the tea-things away, and mamma was seated in the easy chair with her knitting, and the fire had been made up, and Lizzie’s pillows had been arranged, and her big eyes were looking out upon the circle by the fire—a splendid peach that James had brought her lying on a plate

before her—a silence fell over the whole assembly. And the wind, which was an autumn wind, the richest of all the winds, because there are memories in it of the odour-laden winds of the summer nights, and anticipations of the howling blasts of winter, conscious of evil destiny—the wind, I say—the autumn wind—just rose once and shook the windows of the room, as if it would gladly have come in to make one of our number, only it could not, doomed to the darkness without; and so died away with the moan of a hound. And then the fire flashed up as if glorying over the wind that it was of the party; and its light shone in the great old mirror at the back of the room, and in mamma's spectacles, and in Lizzie's eyes, and in a great silver watch-key, an inch and a half square, which James had brought from Thun with him, with a cow and a bell on one side, and a man and a pot on the other.

“‘Now, James, tell us all about it,’ said Lizzie, so cherrily that you would hardly have believed anything was the matter with her.

“‘All about what, Lizzie?’ returned James, with his own smile, which has more behind it than any other smile I know.

“‘Why, about Switzerland, of course.’

“‘How am I to do that, Lizzie, when I was there only ten days?’

“‘You were away three whole weeks.’

“‘Yes; but it takes time to go, and time to come back. For Switzerland isn't behind Hampstead Heath, exactly. I takes a great deal of travelling to reach it.’

“‘Then you must tell us all you can, James,’ said I.

“‘Do take me up an Alp,’ said Lizzie. ‘I'm so tired of lying here all day. I climb Alps sometimes at night; but I want to go up one awake, with a hold of you, James.’

“‘Well, Lizzie, I don't pretend to know anything about Switzerland; but I think I have a little notion of an Alp. I

used to think I knew what a mountain was ; but I didn't. And now I doubt if I can give you any idea of the creature, for it is one thing to know or feel, and quite another to be able to make your friend know or feel as you do.'

" ' We will all try hard, James.—Won't we ? ' I said.

" ' I have no distrust of my audience,' he returned ; ' but my visit to Switzerland convinced me of three things—all negatives. First, of the incapacity of the memory to retain the impressions made upon it. The wonder of the sight seemed to destroy the stuff upon which it was figured, as an overheated brand might burn its own mark out. Second, for I can give you these conclusions as pat and as dull as a sermon—my visit convinced me of the futility of words to describe what I saw ; and, third, of the poverty of photography in recording such visions. I did not bring a single photograph home with me. To show one to any of you would be like sending my mother that photograph of golden-haired Jane (I must write what he said) without one glimmer of the gold, without one flash of the smile—all smoke and shadow—an unvarying petrification. I hate the photographs. They convey no idea but of extreme outline. The tints, and the lines, and the mass, and the shadows, and the streams, and the vapours, and the mingling, and the infinitude, and the loftiness, and the glaciers, and the slow-crawling avalanches cannot be represented. Even my mind retains only a general impression. I forgot what had delighted me yesterday.'

" ' Isn't it like a book, to hear him talk ? ' said Maria.

" To which I answered : ' That depends on what book you mean, Maria.'

" I saw I had hurt her, and was sorry directly ; but I could not interrupt James to tell her so. I therefore gave her a look that was known between us, and all was right, and I was able to go on enjoying.

“ ‘Tell us how you saw the Alps first then, James, and what they looked like,’ I said.

“ ‘The very moment when I first saw them is burnt out and gone. But the first succession of sights I remember well. I had tried to get a view of them from a great distance across the plain from Schaffhausen, climbing a little hill that lies on the left bank of the river above the falls ;—’

“ ‘Do tell us about the falls,’ said Maria.

“ ‘Please don’t drag me off the road to places I don’t want to go to. That’s the way to put all our party out of temper. The falls are beautiful, in spite of cockney innkeepers and Bengal lights ; but I’m off for the Alps, and all the cataracts in the world shall not keep me. You will come with me, won’t you, Lizzie ?’

“ ‘Yes, that I will, James,’ said the sweet pale-face.

“ ‘We all begged to be allowed to go too, and promised not to interrupt him again, even to pluck an Alpine rose.

“ ‘Come up this steep path then, between a fence and a vineyard. You hear behind you the roar of the falling Rhine ; but let it roar. We climb and come into a thicket of small firs, and through that to an open heathy spot, with a plain stretching far away just in front of us. The day is tolerably clear, but it is a chance if we can see the Alps. Sit down on the dry grass. It is dry enough even for Lizzie. A little this way, and you will clear that group of trees. Now think of what you love best, for perhaps you are going to see mountains. Look away to the farthest-opened horizon, through many gradations of faint-shadowy blue. Yes, there are hills, yea, mountains enough—swells, and heaps, and humps, and mounds, and cupolas, all in grey and blue ; you can count I don’t know how many distances—five perhaps, one rising over the other, scattering forward out of the infinite like the ranks of an ill-disciplined army of giants. But you see no cones or peaks,

and no white-crowned elect, and you are disappointed. The fact is, you do not see *The Alps* at all. You see but some of the steps of the vast stair leading up to their solitary thrones, where they sit judging the tribes of men that go creeping about below them after the eating, and the drinking, and the clothing, and never lift up their heads into the solitary air to be alone with him with whom solitude and union are one.—‘I forgot myself,’ said James, after a pause. ‘I beg your pardon.’

“‘Oh! do talk like that, James,’ said Lizzie. ‘I can’t say I quite understand you, but I feel that I shall understand you when I have had a little time.’

“Now, though I am not half so good as Lizzie, I think I could understand James. And if I could not, how could I have remembered what he said so as to tell it as I do now? But then I *think* I know more about James than Lizzie, or Maria, or even mamma does; for I have *poetry* of James’s. And when I read it first, I could make nothing of it; and when I read it again, glimmerings came out of it; and when I read it again, there were only some dark spots left here and there in it; and when I read it the fourth time, I understood it perfectly; and when I read it the fifth time, I began to be afraid that I knew nothing at all about it.

“‘Thank you Lizzie,’ said James.—‘Well, I will let it come when it does come, though I don’t *want* to talk in that excited way even about the Alps. It is just like the sixpenny books of the words at the Popular Concerts at St. James’s Hall.—Well, you don’t see the father and mother Alps; you only see the little ones about their feet; and we must set off at once for Berne—by the railway. And this is rather a trial to us. We don’t like to be under obligation to such an obtrusive snake, without a particle of conscience or even reverence in its hydra-head. Its directors are just like the toads and frogs of Egypt that wouldn’t even keep out of the king’s chamber. Indifferent

to its own ugliness, instead of creeping away like an honest snake in quiet places, and coming into notice only when there is no help for it, it insists on sharing the sun with any river; yea, even on crossing the Rhine close above the torture of its terrible fall. It has a right to be somewhere, but not there. If they lay in its way, and it didn't cost too much, it would go right through Strasburg and Cologne Cathedrals; hissing its vile soul out in the chancel, that the passengers might have a peep at the queer fancies of our stupid forefathers, who could care to build such places, and never found out the use of steam and iron rails. Nature, however, will soon cast the folds of her living garment over the unsightliness of its bare mechanism, weaving it kindly up with the many threads flowing from the tireless shuttle of her creation; till at last, it may be, the railroad will cease to offend, except where they have actually stabled its monsters in the very shrines of antiquity. Talk of desecration! A troop of horses pawing the tessellated pavement of a chapter-house, beneath the spreading fountain of its arches of palm-boughs in stone, is a small offence compared to the filthy breath of the engine, as it hisses and screams in the very banqueting-hall of the ancient ruin, which centuries of death could not make a thousandth part so sacred in the eyes of the railway-director as the broad expanse of his own shirt-front, beneath which lies—what? Surely the furniture of his thorax cannot really have sunk through the floor into the story below!'

"Now this was a dreadful digression on James's part; and although we laughed at his indignation with the railway-directors, we could not help thinking he might as well have told us about Schaffhausen as run a-tilt against steam-engines. But we dared not make a single remark lest he should stop like an offended llama, and lie down on the wayside beneath the burden of his untold tale.

“ ‘On swept the “ fire-mouthed dragon, horrible and bright,” of which surely Spenser had a vision when he wrote thus ; and I blessed the blatant brute in my heart, for it bore me towards those regions of desire which, but for it, I could never have hoped to reach. And suddenly the hills upon the horizon parted as we swept along ; and past the gap, in the distance, slowly sailed, like a spectral fleet of ghastly worlds, the hoary backs and heads of the Alpine orearchs. Then in glided the nearer hills, and hid them from my eyes—which straightway scarce believed for very gladness. The moment they vanished, it seemed as if some awful reason concealed them ; as if they sat pondering terrible mysteries in their secret place. Again a revealing gap in the nearer mountains ; and again the silent terrors flitted slowly by. They were so white, Lizzie ! so dreadful ! yet so beautiful ! Again and again they appeared and vanished, for we seemed to be running alongside of them at a vast distance away. And when the range of heights which concealed them from us drew nearer, and opened at no great distance from our course, then they would rush across the breach in wild haste and white dead-like beauty—great heaps with one or two peaked tops ; though mighty with years and growth, yet spectral and savage. They seized upon me utterly. Though not quite like what I had expected, they were much beyond it. Their vastness, more than their hoped-for height, took possession of me. I wonder if mountains strike other people as they do me. I generally see them like strange animals, lying down—almost always couching—with more or less vague remindings of creatures of the known world. Ben Nevis, for instance, seen from the south, always looks to me like a winged elephant ; and one of the hills of Morven, away in the west, like a grey-fleeced ram with curled horns, marching eternally forward into space. And now, looking towards the Alps, I saw them like a flock of awful white sheep, lying there

under the guardianship of some mighty Titan shepherd—sheep and yet not sheep; warlike and sombrely fierce creatures—perhaps the dogs of the great angels that guard the coasts of our world from the inroads of the fiends. If one of those creatures were but to rise and shake itself! Ah! the stillness of power that lay about their rooted persistency, as they faced the gulf of nothingness, looking abroad, and daring the blank space with existence! For it seems to me, almost always, that the backs of the beasts are towards me, and that their terribly quiet faces are looking out into the unknown.—Do you know, Lizzie, I think I understand what gave rise to the grand old fable of the giants? The Greeks saw human shapes everywhere—as all true poets do. And it is not always the form of an animal that I see shadowed in a mountain, but sometimes the form of a buried man, struggling and straining to rise from beneath the superincumbent mass, which has fallen into some shadowy, almost obliterated correspondence to the huge form which it covers. In one mountain especially, in the west of Scotland, I see the shoulders of a giant heaving away from his neck and down-bent head the weary weight of centuries. I could almost fancy I saw the outline of the knotted muscles approaching the surface in the agonizing effort to rise. But, as I said, I felt, when I saw the Alps, that I had never seen a mountain before, had never known, in fact, what a mountain was. And all the shapes of men and creatures vanished when I came near, and there was nothing there but their own selves, like nothing but what they are—the children of the great earth, thrust forth from her molten heart of fire into the everlasting cold.'

“‘As I journeyed on I fell fast asleep, for I had slept little since leaving London, and although I heard them around me talking about the Alps, I could not rouse myself to the effort of looking. And so we drew gradually nearer to them. And

as my senses returned, I began to regret that I had not conquered sleep and watched the mountains; and I feared that the opportunity was now over. I managed, then, to rouse myself a little and look out of the window. And, between the waves of sleep, I saw a mighty wonder lifted up from the earth, a mountain indeed with snowy head, barred across beneath it with grey dashes of cloud—a child of earth, dwelling in heaven. I was so deeply satisfied that I again fell fast asleep; and that vision shines on with the glory of a dream, for it is “rounded with a sleep.”

“‘Perhaps it was a sleep,’ Lizzie ventured to say, ‘and your own soul was making a mountain for itself. I wish I could tell, as you can, the things I see in my sleep. Do you know, I think I have dreams given me at night just because I cannot go out and see things.’

“‘That I don’t doubt, Lizzie. But I am satisfied that vision of mine was not a dream, although it came in the midst of sleep, and its edges were shaded off into it. But as I can give you no idea of the delight it woke in me, the question becomes of no importance.’

“‘I wish, most heartily do I wish, that there were in Switzerland some quiet roadside-inns as in Wales, for instance, where you might be served with *humanity*—with that, over and above corporeal needs, which cannot be paid for, and can only be acknowledged by gratitude. The hotels were the one part of the business which I detested. And then the charges were so high that they left no margin for a poor man like me to be generous. But when I say that I hate the hotels, it is chiefly from a sense of personal discomfort, and not from any dislike to meeting my countrymen, however unlike the mountains they may look. It is a comical reflection, that a large proportion of the English visitors at any great summer haunt, are looking upon each other as intruders—as destructive of the

solitude or ruralness of the place ; each considering himself only a privileged individual, who may tread the courts of Nature without bringing defilement by his presence, and leaving it behind in his traces. At least many talk like this when they come home. It seems to me the very essence of *snobbery*. No doubt one must meet people everywhere that seem out of their proper place ; but for one to glorify himself upon such an election as admits him to a *tête-à-tête* with Nature and excludes others, seems to me second in enormity only to the same principle of self-glorification operating in religion. Let him laugh at the cockneys if he will, only let him be kind-hearted ; let him avoid their society if he pleases, for much of it may not be desirable ; but let him acknowledge the equality of their right in Nature ; and when he is thrown into their company, let him behave, not like the gentleman he considers himself to be, but like the gentleman he ought to be. Is there not plenty of room upon those wastes for him and for them ? Love will provide a solitude in the crowd ; and dislike will fill the desert itself with unpleasant forms. Nature cannot be wronged by the presence of any of her children, even if they have been ill-bred and ill-taught in the fostering city. Greet then thy brother kindly when he crosses thy path, whether he be fine-toned critic who gently condescends to the exoterics of Nature, or thy big, blustering, ignorant brother, who regards all he has seen only as matter of boastful comparison with what another has or has not seen. Try to convey the impression of some mighty existence you have beheld ; find that you have made a mistake by the “ Oh ! but you should have seen so-and-so, as I did, on such-and-such an occasion ; ” and keep not only your inward temper, but your more inward kindness, and to you the Alps will be the stair up to the throne of God. But the man who loves not his brother may crest their highest peaks, may stand on the uttermost stone, like the living plume

of the giant's helmet, and yet never be there. All that is there will be but the phantom, the simulacrum of himself—bones, and muscles, and entrails. He himself shall not have ascended the lowest step leading to the porch of the temple; while the poor cockney who has no words in which to express himself, save those of the counter or the Derby, but is free from contempt of his neighbour, may unconsciously receive some of the essential teaching of these parables in rocks—these sermons in stone. Who can tell what these visions may effect in the process of his redemption into the upper air? At least I for one will hope for him. And I will not believe that these savage solitudes are less terrible or wild because here and there about their feet, and over their rocky necks, creep and climb human beings whom other human beings will not admit as of their kind, because they are not ladies and gentlemen; these others being in their turn despised by the self-conscious youth and maiden of ecstatic sensibility, because they can neither preserve a poetic silence, nor utter new commonplaces about the nature before them. Would it not be better to rejoice in the knowledge that these two have escaped for a time from less elevating thoughts, and more sordid cares; for it is not the interest in to-day's dinner so much as the anxiety about to-morrow's that oppresses and degrades the man? the world is made up of all kinds, and why should not all kinds flock to Switzerland if they please? It will not hurt them, and they cannot hurt it. If Shakespeare had been fastidious as he was refined, where should we, where would he be now? Despise a man, and you become of the kind you would make him; love him, and you lift him into yours.'

"Now James's talk was more like talk than this; but this is as near as I can give it. And it seems to me worth giving, although another may think differently.

"Here, however, he stopped again, and looked vexed with

himself that he had been preaching instead of narrating. But presently he recovered his self-possession, and went on.

“‘It had always been one of the longings of my heart,’ he said, ‘to be in the midst of the mountains, shut in with protection, and beholding, far above my head, the lonely, sky-invading peaks. Now here I was at last, going up a valley towards the heart of the Bernese giants. It was a narrow valley, whose steep sides were crowded with those up-reaching, slender, graceful pines, the one striking its roots at the level of its neighbour’s topmost boughs, to a height casting discredit on the testimony of the poor sense. The valley wound about, like the stream in its bottom ; and at one of the turns, it was closed in (to the eye, I mean) by a huge shoulder of rock. And what is that shining thing which lies spread out on the rock, just like the skin of an animal stretched out to dry—grey, and green, and white? There are the four legs and the tail, a grisly sight, notwithstanding the homely suggestion of the drawing-room rug of people with friends in tiger-breeding India! That is a glacier, no doubt! And a cold breath sweeping down the valley, as if from across its expanse of distance-shrunk miles, confirms my suspicion of the region “where all life dies and death lives.”’

“‘Soon I was housed in one of those centres of the “fortuitous concourse” of human atoms, called a hotel ; which I hate, I think, nearly as much as any poetic exquisite in existence. But had I not sufficient compensation, when, going down from bedroom, whose window afforded little view, I peeped from one of those in the public room, and, out in the dimly moonlit night, saw a faintly shimmering ghostly peak far up in the air at distance undefined, haunting the valley, haunting the house—haunting my heart, never henceforth to let it go free from its lovely terrible presence? I had been looking at that same mountain an hour or two before, when the mists on

the sides of the valley shone lurid in the sunset. No red touched its cold peaks: it looked on, hard and unresponsive; dead with whiteness, and hard with black rocks. But in the moonlight it glimmered out gentle as the ghost of a maiden.

“‘It was, however, when I climbed the opposing hill, on the back of an animal called a horse, but made very like a giraffe, that I felt the first full impression of what a mountain is. For across the valley rose a vast upheaved desert, a wilderness of mountain heaps, ranges, slopes, and peaks, of which the nearest outwork, forming the side of the valley up whose corresponding side I was ascending, was a precipice that filled me with horror. This horror was not fear exactly, for I could not fall down *that* precipice whatever other I might fail to escape. But its stony wall, starting from such a height, and sinking plumb-down out of sight in the narrow valley, the bottom of which I could not see, fronted me like the stare of a nameless dismay. I strove against it, and not without success, although the overpowering wonder of that which rose above this wall was not strengthening to the nerves or soothing to the imagination. I knew, even while I gazed upon it, that I should not remember what I saw or felt, or be able to describe it. It was such a chaotic loveliness and awfulness intermingled in savage harmony!—a changeful vision of glaciers, of shifting clouds, of rocks, of falling streams, of snow, of waste wild peaks, of stretches of all kinds of mass, and shape, and surface, mingling in all degrees of height and shadow. And this they said was the *foot* of the Jungfrau! Down below, in the valley we had left, lay fields of bright green, looking as smooth as a shaven lawn, dotted all over with little brown, wooden, toylike houses, the shelter of the goats in winter, to which were visible no paths to destroy the perfect green smoothness. These fields (or indeed *lawns* would be the nearer word) sloped up, with more or less inclination, to the foot of precipices

of rock, on the top of which came other green lawns, dotted in like manner with little wooden houses of a rich brown, and sloping also to other precipices rising above them in turn. But the fields grew more rugged and bare upon the ascending terraces, and great lumps of stone came sticking through them, until at last rose the naked mountain, "horrid all with" rock, over which wandered the feeble clouds. And down into the midst of the rocks came the tongues, and jags, and roots of the snow and ice, which higher and higher drew closer and closer together, till the peaks were one smooth, sunshiny whiteness, except where precipices, on which no snow could lie, rose black in the midst, seeming to retire, like dark hollows, from the self-assertion of the infinite glitter, while the projecting rocks looked like holes in the snow. And here and there, over the mountain, lay the glaciers, looking lovelily uneven; fretted, purfled, and wrinkled, like a wrought architectural surface; mostly white, but mottled with touches of colour, which seemed to me mostly green, though at times I could not say that it was not blue; in either case a colour most delicate and delectable to behold.

"Here I put up at a little wooden inn, the only inn I remember with some satisfaction. It was so strange! You would have felt just like wooden dolls in a wooden dolls'-house. My bedchamber reminded me of Gulliver's box in which he was carried about by his nurse, Glumdalclitch, in Brobdingnag. It was just a box with a bed in it—nothing but smooth boards to be seen about you. And here, almost six thousand feet above the sea, potatoes were growing under the windows, and grass was everywhere—a sea of green about the village, whose wooden houses were browned and scorched, and had the ends of their logs furrowed into wrinkles—dividing their annual rings, by the rain and the sun. For all about they were protected by far loftier peaks and walls; so that a height which in Wales or in Scotland would have been a bare rock,

was here a food-bearing country, trodden by man and beast, and haunted by lovely butterflies. Indeed, the village is nearly as high as the top of half a Snowdon set on a whole one. And across the gulf at your feet stands the White Maiden, now hidden in thousandfold mist, now dawning out of the cloud. How the purposeless mists do go wandering about, now withdrawing a little, now gathering again, creeping in all shapes over the faces of the hills, and then swallowing all up as if there could be nothing there !

“ ‘ I wandered about here for a day or two, haunting the borders of the terrible gulf in whose unseen depth lay the pleasant fields of the lower valley, down into which, at night, I had met the deer-like goats trooping with their multitudinous patter of feet, branching of horns, and ringing of bells. But out of this lovely depth below would suddenly sweep up a mass of vapour, as if all beneath had been a caldron set upon an awful fire, and not the green, pleasant places of the earth. It would drift about in the valley as in a trough, and then all at once steaming up, swathe and obliterate, in a few moments, the whole universe of heights and hollows, snows and precipices—everything but a yard or two of the earth around me. I would know that all that land of enchantment and fear lay there, but could see nothing, although through the mist might come the prolonged roll of the avalanche falling, far off, down the slopes and steeps of the Jungfrau. This might happen twenty times in a day. Then the mist would suddenly part a little, high towards the heavens perhaps, and you would see a solitary glitter, whiter than the mist—the peak of a dweller in the sky. And the mist would range, and change, and darken, and clear, a perfect embodiment of lovely lawlessness, revealing such dazzling wastes of whiteness, here more dazzling, and there melting into the cloud, so that you could not part cloud and snow ! In another place, where the

snow had fallen along the ribs of a precipice in furrows converging from the top, you would seem to look upon the fierce explosion of a snow-mine, radiating from a centre of blinding whiteness. And there again would come a sweep of deadly glacier, spotted with green light, through the upright scales of its splintered waves—a frozen storm—mimicking the Alpine ranges, jagged into many peaks like them; but all showing from where you stand only as mottlings and unevenness. And all this would be varied to absolute infinitude of bright and dark, of seen and unseen, by the shifting clouds. Standing watching the heavenly show, and rejoicing in the loftiness of some emergent peak, I would say to myself, “There, that is high! But I wish I could see one up there—as high as that! Then I should be satisfied.” And out would come another peak away up there; and yet I would not be satisfied. And a higher still would gleam out, like a cloud grown solid, from the liquidly shifting mass; and strange hints would appear of a yet further and higher amid those blankets of the dark beyond. And yet I cannot say that I have seen a mountain-top high enough to satisfy the longing of my eyes; for I fear they cannot, as the wise man says, be filled with seeing.

“ ‘I wandered along the green fields one morning, opposite the waste mountain, and soon came to a shallow green dell, in the bottom of which ran a brawling little stream. It was like many a dell I had seen in Scotland, with a thicket of small, slender, girl-like trees, where the path crossed it: it was like finding a bit of home in the midst of abroad; like wandering in a strange house, in a dream, you know, Lizzie, and all at once coming upon your own room nestling in the middle of it. And I felt a fanciful pity for the little stream which was hurrying away over its stones so fast, nearer and nearer to some terrible slope and headlong fall into the valley below, ere it reached which it might be “pouldered all as thin as flour,”

in its downward, stayless rush against the steep opposing air.'

"Here followed another pause, and James sat staring into the fire, which had reached the peaceful condition of middle age—all in a glow without flame. Again the wind made a rush at the window and died away. I remember it so well, because I saw James start and listen as if it reminded him of some sound he had heard in the wild Alps. It roused him from his reverie, and set him talking again. Turning to Lizzie, he said:—

" 'I wish I could make you see one of those wildly-grand visions. But I cannot, and it troubles me that I cannot.—I wish I were rich, Lizzie, to take you all there. If I were, you should be carried in a chair, as many ladies are. It would be jolly!'

" 'Yes, that it would, thank you, James,' answered Lizzie, with a smile that left her lip quivering. 'But when I die, I shall, if God will let me, take Switzerland on my way; and I daresay I shall see it all the better so.'

"None of us answered this. And after a moment's sad pause, James went on.

" 'I left this village with regret. Our landlord was a decent fellow, and the people there did not bore you to buy. But it would be as unfair to judge the Swiss by those met upon the ordinary tourist-routes as it would be to judge Scotchmen by the wandering specimens who, representing themselves as having failed in the "tuitional line," go about among their countrymen in London, infesting them into the purchase of steel pens, which they don't want, at double their value, protesting all the time against charity and obligation.

" 'But I don't want to talk now about anything but the mountains, and the impression those creatures made upon me.—It is a pity I am so little of a walker. What wonders I

might have seen ! But you know ever since that attack last winter, a few miles on tolerably level road is all that I can manage. So when I resolved to cross what they call the Wengern Alp into the next valley, there was no way to manage it except on horseback. The mare on which I made that day's journey—let her name be known—she was called Mattie by my kind, half-witted guide, whom I hope to meet again—would carry me safely from the garret to the cellar of any house in London, where the stair was wide enough. At least I shouldn't much mind trying her—throwing the reins on her neck too. But, indeed, that is the only safe way.

“ ‘I started on a fine August morning, and zigzagged for hours up the hill opposite that I had ascended before ; at first in short—*vandykes*, mightn't I say, Jane ?—then in longer stretches and gentler slopes of ascent ; and then back to the vandykes again ; now through pine-woods, now along the edge of steep descents, and now along the green slopes of hill-sides. Climbing at last a green shoulder, much torn with rain-torrents, I suddenly found myself face to face with the mass of the Jungfrau from the valley to the Silverhorn. I could have fallen on my knees before it. That moment I cannot describe. Great clouds crept like pigmy imitations across the front of the mighty real, which towered one rock from its base of precipices up to its crown of snows. And as the rock towered, so its streams fell—in snow from its snow-crown, in water from the caverns of its outspread glaciers ; as if the great bald head sought such hair as it could find to cover its nakedness. And ever and anon you might hear the fall of one of its snow-streams thundering from some jagged solitude, which in the space before you might look but a rent in the mountain, or scar upon its rough face. For the avalanches are just streams of snow, now slipping down an inclined plane, presenting from a distance the strange contrast of a slow-creeping river mantled

with the foam of a furious haste—sometimes falling sheer over a precipice, a cataract of snow, not, like a river, to gather its force and flow on, but to rest hurtless and silent as death at its foot. One which had been pointed out to me from the other side of the valley, a thin thread dropping far away in the mystery of mountain-tortuosity, we found lying a triangular mass of whiteness, a huge heap at the foot of the Jungfrau.

“ ‘I stood and watched the torrents that rushed ceaseless from the cold mouths of the recumbent glaciers. I saw them dilate and contract by the measure of three as they fell; as if some mighty, not yet dead heart within drove, in pulsing beats, the arterial blood of the mountain from a wide wound in its rugged side.

“ ‘Now the clouds would gather and half wrap the great thing in their folds, as for an appointed time the weak and evanescent can always obscure the strong and the lasting; and over their swathing bands would appear the giant head of the all-careless mountain. Now they swallowed her up, and she retired equally careless into the awful unseen. I turned my back upon her and descended towards the valley.

“ ‘A steep green slope, which we first scrambled up and then rode along; the first of a shower; big cattle, each with its big bell on a broad belt round its neck, glooming through the rain; faster and faster descent of rain-drops; the water running into my boots; steeper and steeper descents; fog, through which nothing but the nearest objects can be seen; a more level spot of grass, with rocks sticking through it in every direction, and haggard old fir-trees standing half dead about a stream running over the rockiest of channels and down the steepest of descents not to be a succession of waterfalls, banked everywhere by this green grass—the whole making up one of the two places I saw where I would build a house;—singing women; a glass of brandy at a roadside inn; the Eiger hanging

over us through the fog, fearfully high and fearfully overhanging, like nothing I can think of but Mount Sinai in the *Pilgrim's Progress*; a scrambling down rocky stairs; and then, through the mist, that for which I have brought you all this way in the pouring rain—the sharp-edged, all but perpendicular outline of the Wetterhorn, close in front of our faces—nothing but a faint mass and a clear edge—the most frightful appearance by far we have yet seen. I would not for a month's sunshine have lost that sight. If I could draw at all, nothing would be easier than to let you see it, as it rushed from the earth through the mist into the sky. A single line, varying in direction, yet in the effect nearly perpendicular, seen through a grey mist—that is all. And all I can say is, *It was terrible*; and there is little good in saying anything, except your saying is your friend's seeing.'

“‘I see it,’ each of us cried.

“‘Well,’ returned James, ‘it was just a thing you might dream. No detail—only an effect. But, alas! next day, when we were all dry, air, and mountain, and I, it was so different. The Wetterhorn—and it just strikes me that it must have been named on such another afternoon as that on which I saw it first—the next day, I say, *The Horn of the Tempest* had retired into the hollow of the air; showed not its profile only, but its whole countenance, and yet stood back, and looked nothing remarkable—far lower, exceedingly less imposing. Without being an illustration, it yet reminded me of those fine lines of Shelley—you must not forgive the cockneyism in the third line, although I don't believe he meant to leave it so; and you may see the line ought to end with a rhyme to *storm*:—a very scarce rhyme. *Form*, *enorm*, I think are all except *Cairn-gorm*. *Worm* won't do except under very difficult circumstances.

The Apennine in the light of day
Is a mighty mountain, dim and grey,

Which between the earth and sky doth lay ;
But when night comes, a chaos dread
On the dim starlight then is spread,
And the Apennine walks abroad with the storm.

“ ‘And this brings me to a question I have thought a good deal about. I don’t think I have yet found more than the half of the answer. “ *Why do the mountains look such different heights at different times?* ” It is easy to say that the cause lies in different conditions of the atmosphere. Very probably—at least sometimes. But still why, while the angle of elevation remains the same upon the eye, should the mountain look different heights? It leads me up to a wide field which I cannot enter now, for you would be wanting me to go home before I was half across it.’

“ ‘Do go on, James,’ we all said.

“ ‘No,’ answered James. ‘It would be too metaphysical besides. I only say one thing : I’m certain that the aspect in which the mountain looks highest is the truest as to height. Nor can any arrangement of clouds make a mountain look higher than it is, or produce an unreal and exaggerated impression of it. But it is marvellous what a difference a few streaks of cloud laid horizontally across the face of a mountain can do to lift its head up in the brain. And that has nothing to do with the atmosphere between. A judgment of the distance has certainly everything to do with the *estimating* of the height of a mountain, and the state of the atmosphere has much to do with forming such a judgment ; but I am not speaking about *estimating* at all, but about *feeling*. Here is a little bit bearing on the subject which I wrote in my pocket-book at Thun :—

“ “Looking across this strange little town to the opposite hills last night, I thought them lower than Glencoe, or Ben Nevis, or Snowdon—that is, I almost came to that as a conclusion. Now I see them with clouds across them, and they

look twice the height they looked before. Take my ram from Morven, and set Ben Nevis and the two sides of Glencoe and Ben Cruachan in a range on his back, and you would have something like the height as well as something like the aspect of the range in front of me. But it would not impress you so at once, although one of these tops is twice the height of Ben Nevis, and more. Why do we not see them higher then? Just because the *camera obscura* of our minds cannot get its lens all at once adjusted to the facts. And there is another reason: away to the left, in a land of cloud, invisible to-day, but yesterday nearer to all appearance and clearer than those before me now, lie, like the flocks of a giant shepherd-king sitting on the circle of the earth, the white-fleeced mountains, whose very calm looks like a frozen storm, and the highest of which is nearly twice as high as the highest of those in front of me now.”—You will forgive the repetition. I read this to show you how I thought about the varying impression of height when I was amidst the mountains.—I am satisfied just of that one thing, that, so far from a false impression being possible, no accumulation of atmospheric aids to impression can ever generate a feeling correspondent to the facts. Meantime, I have not yet seen a mountain high enough to content me. I *should* like to see the Himmalayahs. Shall I ever look on one whose top goes far enough up amongst the stars to please even my dream-moods? Would those fearful mountains in the moon satisfy me, I wonder? Somehow or other, shall not even our fancies be filled one day?’

“James here making a pause—

“‘Read us a little more out of that pocket-book, won’t you, James?’ said Maria.

“‘I think I have given you everything worth giving you about the mountains,’ he answered; ‘and I won’t talk about anything else to-night. Well’—turning over the leaves of his

book—‘here is another passage which I don’t mind reading if you don’t mind listening to it. After mentioning the tiger-skin glacier, as I called it, my note goes on thus: ‘Soon we saw another greater glacier.—These were the garments of the Jungfrau, and the lady looks very fierce and lovely; and the wind over her clothes smells of no sweet spices, but of cold, beautiful death. This glacier was precipitous, and seemed to come pouring over the sharp edge next the sky, as like white water, with dim glints of green in it such as cataracts often have, as anything motionless—motionless as the face of a dead man—could look. All its forms are of waves and wildly-driven waters; yet there it rests. It thinks, it dreams of what a rush it would make down that mountain-side, if only that frost would let it go

“‘And now I have seen the maiden in her night-attire, walking in her sleep. You would not know her from an intensely white cloud—cold white—up there in the sky, over the edge of the near, lofty ridge.’

* * * * *

“‘How shall I convey an idea of the *prettiness* of the valley below? It is like playing at the country—like the kingdom of the dolls. It reminds me much of the impression produced by Sir Philip Sidney’s descriptions of nature in the *Arcadia*. From the stream which runs along the bottom of the valley rise, with much, though varying steepness, and with all sorts and sizes of gently-rounded irregularity, the greenest expanses of grass that heart can desire, up to the foot of an absolute wall of rock, over which in parts look the snow-peaks from afar; and yet they are so near that they are as part of the furniture of your house. If you saw the grass in a picture, you would object to it as badly painted, because too velvety, too soft, too delicately green. It seems as well-kept and mown as a lawn, and all studded over with neat little brown houses, some for men and women and children, some for cows and calves, some

for goats and kids, all built in much the same fashion, all pretty wooden boxes with overhanging eaves. The brown earth shows nowhere. All is grass lawn. Indeed, these lower valleys produced upon me the impression of too much neatness, of obtrusive tidiness—as if the Swiss people were the little children whose fathers and mothers, giants up amongst the rocks, had sent them down to play here, out of the dangers of the mighty games going on up there in the cloudy regions. The whole was so pretty as to produce a sense of pettiness. And down upon this gentle, neat, book-pastoral, stare the fruitless hills—no, nothing in nature *stares*—gaze the fruitless hills; or rather, above it they rise, never looking down; rise like the God of the hopeless, who sees, or could see, but heeds not. They are terrible creatures, these mountains. They never love, never have any children; stand there in the cold, and the wind, and the snow, crawled over by the serpent-glaciers, worn and divided by the keen grinding saw of the long-drawn torrents: they feel nothing, they hope nothing. But glorious are the rivers that come down from their glaciers, sweeping blue and bank-full through the lovely towns of the land; and glorious are the mountain-thoughts—the spiritually-metamorphosed reflection of themselves—they raise in the minds of men.

* * * * * * *

“As I stood this evening and gazed at the glaciers, I thought I saw, through the slow clouds over them, streaks that were not of cloud. And straightway out dawned the mountain. Higher and higher parts appeared, and higher and further off still. Such a mingling of cloud and mountain! “If I could only see that height cleared!” And it was cleared; and therewith the hint of a further dwarfed it. And nothing of all this show was quite after my anticipation of mountains and their peaks, but grander; less showy, and more imaginative. How it all changed and changed! And the highest points never ap-

peared at all. And then when the blue heaven came, it dwarfed them all.'

* * * * *

"Here James closed his note-book.

"'Weren't you very sorry to leave the mountains, James?'

"'Not in the least. They are not for every-day wear. I think almost I was relieved when I got upon a good space of level land again. I am not sure that they weren't too much for me, always so high, and so rugged, and so lonely. It certainly was a pleasure to see the horizon far off again. They didn't leave me room enough, perhaps. But I cannot quite tell. And, besides, I have not left them. I have them in me.'

"'That is how you have brought them home to us, James,' said Lizzie, in a tone which he thought sounded weary; though, if it was, it must have been from too much pleasure.

"'Well, you had better dream about them now, Lizzie,' he said, 'for it is time I left you in peace.'

"And he rose to say good-night.

"'But do just tell me one thing: Did you go on a glacier at all?' said Maria.

"'Only in the most humble fashion—just trod on the tail of one creature that comes down into the bottom of the valley like a dragon of the cold, daring the summer and the torture of the soft wind. It was strange to walk over the rough snow on its surface, or rather gravelly ice, for it was just like rough salt for fish-curing, and feel the warm wind blowing in your face, as, looking up the steep-sloping ravine, you gazed at the splintered pinnacles of the ice, with the light shining green through them. On the tail you could walk, but along the rugged back up there, there was no passing. It looked just like a multitude of alabaster slabs set up on end.'

"'Was the colour of the ice really green or blue?' I asked.

"'I will tell you where there was no doubt of the blue,' he

answered. 'They have cut out, for the sake of poor things like me, a small winding cave into this glacier, entering on the level of the ground. Maria would shriek with delight at the blue of that ice-cave. What matter that human hands made the cave? No human hands could make, no human fancy invent that blue. The very air that filled the hole was blue. And it grew bluer and darker blue as you went in—such a transparent, liquid, lovely blue! bluer than any sky twice condensed, and yet as clear. It was a delight for an angel, that blue! And there was water running through the roof and along the floor; and the walls were so clean, and smooth, and cold, and wet! How delicious that cold after my hot walk! And when I turned to come out, there stood my companion with the face of "one that hath been seven days drowned"—the ruddy cheek and lips purple, and the white very ghastly. So likewise I looked to him, he said, for the blue changed our *cheer*. And the sunlight was again welcome as I walked back, sucking a lump of the glacier ice.'

"'You have not said one word about either of the young men that went with you, James, till this minute.'

"'No. I have expressly avoided it, because, if I had begun, I should have gone on bringing them in; and I didn't want to say a word about anything else till I had got the mountains off my mind. Right good fellows they were, and are, and we got on capitally. But I've told you enough for once, and have tired out poor Lizzie. Good night.'

"'Go and open the door for him, Jane,' said Lizzie.

"And if I had not written too much already, I should have liked to tell you a dream Lizzie had that night. But I won't. I say good night myself instead.

"If you would like it, I may tell you more about James and Lizzie another time.

"Good night."

When he had thus ended, without giving time for any remarks,—

“I see,” said the curate, “that the ladies are looking as if they wanted to go home, and I am quite ready, Mrs. Armstrong.—But while they put their bonnets on, just let Smith see your schoolroom, Mr. Bloomfield. As an inhabitant of Purley-bridge, I already begin to be proud of it.”

The ladies did go to put on their bonnets. I followed Mr. Bloomfield and the colonel into the schoolroom, and the curate followed me. But after we had looked about us and remarked on the things about for five minutes, finding I had left my handkerchief in the drawing-room, I went back to fetch it. The door was open, and I saw Adela—no bonnet on her head yet—standing face to face with Harry. They were alone. I hesitated for a moment what I should do, and while I hesitated, I could not help seeing the arm of the doctor curved and half-outstretched, as if it would gladly have folded about her, and his face droop and droop, till it could not have been more than half a foot from hers. Now, as far as *my* seeing this was concerned, there was no harm done. But behind me came the curate and the schoolmaster, and they had eyes in their heads, at least equal to mine. Well, no great harm yet. And just far enough down the stair to see into the drawing-room, appeared their wives, who could not fail to see the unconscious pair, at least as well as we men below. Still there was no great harm done, for Mrs. Cathcart was at home, as I have said. But, *horresco referens*! excuse the recondite quotation—at the same moment the form of the colonel appeared, looking over the heads of all before him right in at the drawing-room door, and full at the young sinners, who had heard no sound along the matted passage.

“Here’s a go!” said I to myself—not aloud, observe, for it was slang.

For just think of a man like Harry caught thus in a perfect trap of converging looks.

As if from a sudden feeling of hostile presence, he glanced round—and stood erect. The poor fellow's face at once flushed as red as shame could make it, but he neither lost his self-possession, nor sought to escape under cover of a useless pretence. He turned to the colonel.

"Colonel Cathcart," he said, "I will choose a more suitable time to make my apology. I wish you good night."

He bowed to us all, not choosing to risk a refusal of his hand by the colonel, and went quickly out of the house.

The colonel stood for some moments, which felt to me like minutes, as if he had just mounted guard at the drawing-room door. His face was perfectly expressionless. We men felt very much like stale oysters, and would rather have skipped that same portion of our inevitable existence. What the ladies felt, I do not pretend, being an old bachelor, to divine.

Adela, pale as death, fled up the stair. The only thing left for the rest of us was, to act as much as possible as if nothing were the matter, and get out of the way before the poor girl came down again. As soon as I got home, I went to my own room, and thus avoided the *tête-à-tête* with my host which generally closed our evenings.

The colonel went up to his daughter's room, and remained there for nearly an hour. Adela was not at the breakfast-table the next morning. Her father looked very gloomy, and Mrs. Cathcart grimly satisfied, with *I told you so* written on her face as plainly as I have now written it on the paper. How she came to know anything about it, I can only conjecture.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHAT NEXT?

HARRY called early, and was informed that the colonel was not at home.

"Something's the matter, Mr. Armstrong," said Beeves. "Master's not at home to you to-day, he says, nor any other day till he countermands the order—that was the word, sir. I'm sure I am very sorry, sir."

"So am I," said Harry. "How's your mistress?"

"Haven't seen her to-day, sir. Emma says she's poorly. But she is down. Emma looks as if she knew something and wouldn't tell it. I'll get it out of her though, sir. We'll be having that old Wade coming about the house again, I'm afeard, sir. *He's* no good."

"At all events you will let your master know that I have called," said Harry, as he turned disconsolately, to take his departure.

"That I will, sir. And I'll be sure he hears me. He's rather deaf, sometimes, you know, sir."

"Thank you, Beeves. Good morning."

Now what could have been Harry's intention in calling upon the colonel? Why, as he had said himself, to make an apology. But what kind of apology could he make? Clearly there was only one that would satisfy all parties—and that

must be in the form of a request to be allowed to pay his addresses—(that used to be the phrase in my time—I don't know the young ladies' slang for it nowadays)—to Adela. Did I say—*satisfy all parties*? This was just the one form affairs might take, which would least of all satisfy the colonel. I believe, with all his rigid proprieties, he would have preferred the confession that the doctor had so far forgotten himself as to attempt to snatch a kiss—a theft of which I cannot imagine a gentleman guilty, least of all a doctor from his patient; which relation no doubt the colonel persisted in regarding as the sole possible and everlastingly permanent one between Adela and Harry. The former was, however, the only apology Harry could make; and evidently the colonel expected it when he refused to see him.

But why should he refuse to see him?—The doctor was not on an equality with the colonel. Well, to borrow a form from the Shorter Catechism: wherein consisted the difference between the colonel and the doctor?—The difference between the colonel and the doctor consisted chiefly in this, that whereas the colonel lived by the wits of his ancestors, Harry lived by his own, and therefore was not so respectable as the colonel. Or in other words: the colonel inherited a good estate, with the ordinary quantity of brains; while Harry inherited a good education and an extraordinary quantity of brains. So of course it was very presumptuous in Harry to aspire to the hand of Miss Cathcart.

In the forenoon the curate called upon me, and was shown into the library where I was.

“What's that scapegrace brother of mine been doing, Smith?” he asked, the moment he entered.

“Wanting to marry Adela,” I replied.

“What has he done?”

“Called this morning.”

"And seen Colonel Cathcart?"

"No."

"Not at home?"

"In a social sense, not at home; in a moral sense, very far from at home; in a natural sense, seated in his own arm-chair, with his own work on the Peninsular War open on the table before him."

"Wouldn't see him?"

"No."

"What's he to do then?"

"I think we had better leave that to him. Harry is not the man I take him for if he doesn't know his own way better than you or I can tell him."

"You're right, Smith. How's Miss Cathcart?"

"I have never seen her so well. Certainly she did not come down to breakfast, but I believe that was merely from shyness. She appeared in the dining-room directly after, and although it was evident she had been crying, her step was as light and her colour as fresh as her lover even could wish to see them."

"Then she is not without hope in the matter?"

"If she loves him, and I think she does, she is not without hope. But I do not think the fact of her looking well would be sufficient to prove that. For some mental troubles will favour the return of bodily health. They will at least give one an interest in life."

"Then you think her father has given in a little about it?"

"I don't believe it.—If her illness and she were both of an ordinary kind, she would gain her point now by taking to her bed. But from what I know of Adela she would scorn and resist that."

"Well, we must let matters take their course. Harry is worthy of the best wife in Christendom."

"I believe it. And more, if Adela will make that best wife, I think he will have the best wife. But we must have patience."

Next morning, a letter arrived from Harry to the colonel. I have seen it, and it was to this effect :

"My dear Sir,—As you will not see me, I am forced to write to you. Let my earnest entreaty to be allowed to address your daughter, cover, if it cannot make up for, my inadvertence of the other evening. I am very sorry I have offended you. If you will receive me, I trust you will not find it hard to forget. Yours, &c."

To this the colonel replied :

"Sir,—It is at least useless, if not worse, to apply for an *ex post facto* permission. What I might have answered, had the courtesies of society been observed, it may be easy for me to determine, but it is useless now to repeat. Allow me to say that I consider such behaviour of a medical practitioner towards a young lady, his patient, altogether unworthy of a gentleman, as every member of a learned profession is supposed to be. I have the honour, &c."

I returned the curate's call, and while we were sitting in his study, in walked Harry with a rather rueful countenance.

"What do you say to that, Ralph?" said he, handing his brother the letter.

"Cool," replied Ralph. "But, Harry, my boy, you have given him quite the upper hand of you. How could you be so foolish as kiss the girl there and then?"

"I didn't," said Harry.

"But you did just as bad. You were going to do it."

"I don't think I was. But somehow those great eyes of hers kept pulling and pulling my head, so that I don't know what I was going to do. I remember nothing but her eyes. Suddenly a scared look in them startled me, and I saw it all Mr. Smith, was it so very dishonourable of me?"

"You are the best judge of that yourself, Harry," I answered. "Just let me look at the note."

I read it, folded it up carefully, and returning it, said :

"He's given you a good hold of him there. It is really too bad of Cathcart, being a downright good fellow, to forget that he ran away with Miss Selby, old Sir George, the baronet's daughter. Neither of them ever repented it ; though he was only Captain Cathcart then, in a regiment of foot, too, and was not even next heir to the property he has now."

"Hurrah !" cried Harry.

"Stop, stop. That doesn't make it a bit better," said his brother. "I suppose you mean to argue with him on that ground, do you ?"

"No, I don't. I'm not such a fool. But if I *should* be forced to run away with her, *he* can't complain, you know."

"No, no, Harry, my boy," said I. "That won't do. It would break the old man's heart. You must have patience for a while."

"Yes, yes. I know what I mean to do."

"What ?"

"When I've made up my mind, I never ask advice. It only bewilders a fellow."

"Quite right, Hal," said his brother. "Only don't do anything foolish."

"I won't do anything she doesn't like."

"No, nor anything you won't like yourself afterwards," I ventured to say.

"I hope not," returned he, gravely, as he walked out, too much absorbed to bid either of us *good morning*.

It was now more than time that I should return to town ; but I could not leave affairs in this unsatisfactory state. I therefore lingered on to see what would come next.

CHAPTER XXII.

GENERALSHIP.

THE next day Harry called again.

"Master ain't countermanded the order, Doctor. He ain't at home—not a bit of it. He ain't been out of the house since that night."

"Well, is Miss Cathcart at home?"

"She's said nothing to the contrary, sir. I believe she *is* at home. I know she's out in the garding—on the terridge."

And old Beeves held the door wide open, as if to say—"Don't stop to ask any questions, but step into the garden." Which Harry did.

There was a high gravel terrace along one end of it, always dry and sunny when there was any sun going; and there she was, overlooked by the windows of her papa's room.

Now I do not know anything that passed upon that terrace. How should I know? Neither of them was likely to tell old Smith. And I wonder at the clumsiness of novelists in pretending to reveal all that *he* said, and all that *she* answered. But if I were such a clumsy novelist, I should like to invent it all, and see if I couldn't make you believe every word of it.

This is what I would invent.

The moment Adela caught sight of Harry, she cast one frightened glance up to her father's windows, and stood waiting.

He lifted his hat; and held out his hand. She took it. Neither spoke. They turned together and walked along the terrace.

"I am very sorry," said Harry at last.

"Are you? What for?"

"Because I got you into a scrape."

"Oh! I don't care."

"Don't you?"

"No; not a bit."

"I didn't mean it."

"What didn't you mean?"

"It did look like it, I know."

"Look like what?"

"Adela, you'll drive me crazy. It was all your fault."

"So I told papa, and he was angrier than ever."

"You angel! It wasn't your fault. It was your eyes. I couldn't help it. Adela, I love you dreadfully."

"I'm *so* glad."

She gave a sigh as of relief.

"Why?"

"Because I wished you would. But I don't deserve it. A great clever man like you love a useless girl like me! I *am* so glad!"

"But your papa?"

"I'm so happy, I can't think about him steadily just yet."

"Adela, I love you—so dearly! Only I am too old for you."

"Old! How old are you?"

"Nearly thirty."

"And I'm only one-and-twenty. You're worth one and a half of me—yes twenty of me."

And so their lips played with the ripples of love, while their hearts were heaving with the ground swell of its tempest.

Now what I do know about is this :

The colonel came down-stairs in his dressing-gown and slippers, and found Beeves flattening his nose against the glass of the garden-door.

"Beeves !" said the colonel.

"Sir !" said Beeves, darting round and confronting his master with a face purple and pale from the sense of utter unpreparedness.

"Beeves, where is your mistress ?"

"My mistress, sir ? I beg your pardon, sir, I'm sure, sir ! How should I know, sir ? I ain't let her out. Shall I run up-stairs and see if she is in her room ?"

"Open the door."

Beeves laid violent hold upon the handle of the door, and pulled and twisted, but always took care to pull before he twisted.

"I declare if that stupid Ann ain't been and locked it. It ain't nice in the garden to-day, sir—leastways without goloshes," added he, looking down at his master's slippers.

Now the colonel understood Beeves, and Beeves knew that he understood him. But Beeves knew likewise that the colonel would not give in to the possibility of his servant's taking such liberties with him.

"Never mind," said the colonel ; "I will go the other way."

The moment he was out of sight, Beeves opened the garden-door, and began gesticulating like a madman, fully persuaded that the doctor would make his escape. But so far from being prepared to run away, Harry had come there with the express intention of forcing a conference. So that when the colonel made his appearance on the terrace, the culprits walked slowly towards him. He went to meet them with long military strides, and was the first to speak.

"Mr. Armstrong, to what am I to attribute this intrusion ?"

"Chiefly to the desire of seeing you, Colonel Cathcart."

"And I find you with my daughter!—Adela, go in-doors."

Adela withdrew at once.

"You denied yourself, and I inquired for Miss Cathcart."

"You will oblige me by not calling again."

"Surely I have committed no fault beyond forgiveness."

"You have taken advantage of your admission into my family to entrap the affections of my daughter."

"Colonel Cathcart, as far as my conscience tells me, I have not behaved unworthily."

"Sir, is it not unworthy of a gentleman to use such professional advantages to gain the favour of one who—you will excuse me for reminding you of what you will not allow me to forget—is as much above him in social position, as inferior to him in years and experience."

"Is it always unworthy in a gentleman to aspire to a lady above him in social position, Colonel Cathcart?"

The honesty of the colonel checked all reply to this home-thrust.

Harry resumed:

"At least I am able to maintain my wife in what may be considered comfort."

"Your wife!" exclaimed the colonel, his anger blazing out at the word. "If you use that expression with any prospective reference to Miss Cathcart, I am master enough in my own family to insure you full possession of the presumption. I wish you good morning."

The angry man of war turned on his slippers heel, and was striding away.

"One word, I beg," said Harry.

The colonel had too much courtesy in his nature not to stop and turn half towards the speaker.

"I beg to assure you," said Harry, "that I shall continue to

cherish the hope that after-thoughts will present my conduct, as well as myself, in a more favourable light to Colonel Cathcart."

And he lifted his hat, and walked away by the gate.

"By Jove!" said the colonel, to himself, notwithstanding the rage he was in, "the fellow can express himself like a gentleman, anyhow."

And so he went back to his room, where I heard him pacing about for hours. I believe he found that his better self was not to be so easily put down as he had supposed; and that that better self sided with Adela and Harry.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN UNFORESEEN FORESIGHT.

WHAT else is a providence?

Harry went about his work as usual, only with a graver face.

Adela looked very sad, but without any of her old helpless and hopeless air. Her health was quite established; and she now returned all the attention her father had paid to her.—Fortunately Mrs. Cathcart had gone home.

“Cunning puss!” some of my readers may say; “she was trying to coax the old man out of his resolution.” But such a notion would be quite unjust to my niece. She was more in danger of going to the other extreme, to avoid hypocrisy. But she had the divine gift of knowing what any one she loved was feeling and thinking; and she knew that her father was suffering, and all about it. The old man’s pace grew heavier; the lines about his mouth grew deeper; he sat at table without speaking; he ate very little, and drank more wine. Adela’s eyes followed his every action. I could see that sometimes she was ready to rise and throw her arms about him. Often I saw in her lovely eyes that peculiar clearness of the atmosphere which indicates the nearness of rain. And once or twice she rose and left the room, as if to save her from an otherwise unavoidable exposure of her feelings.

The gloom fell upon the servants too. Beeves waited in a

leaden-handed way, that showed he was determined to do his duty, although it should bring small pleasure with it. He took every opportunity of unburdening his bosom to me.

"It's just like when mis'ess died," said he. "The very cocks walk about the yard as if they had hearse-plumes in their tails. Everybody looks ready to hang hisself, except you, Mr. Smith. And that's a comfort."

The fact was, that I had very little doubt as to how it would all end. But I would not interfere; for I saw that it would be much better for the colonel's heart and conscience to right themselves, than that he should be persuaded to anything. It was very hard for him. He had led his regiment to victory and glory; he had charged and captured many a gun; he had driven the enemy out of many a boldly defended entrenchment; and was it not hard that he could not drive the *eidolon* of a country surgeon out of the bosom of his little girl? (It was hard that he could not; but it would have been a deal harder if he could.) He had nursed and loved, and petted and spoiled her. And she *would* care for a man whom he disliked!

But here the old man was mistaken. He did not dislike Harry Armstrong. He admired and honoured him. He almost loved him for his gallant devotion to his duty. He would have been proud of him for a son—but not for a son-in-law. He would not have minded adopting him, or doing anything *but* giving him Adela. There was a great deal of pride left in the old soldier, and that must be taken out of him. We shall all have to thank God for the whip of scorpions which, if needful, will do its part to drive us into the kingdom of heaven.

"How happy the dear old man will be," I said to myself, "when he just yields this last castle of selfishness, and walks unhoused into the new childhood, of which God takes care!"

And this end came sooner than I had looked for it.

I had made up my mind that it would be better for me to go.

When I told Adela that I must go, she gave me a look in which lay the whole story in light and in tears. I answered with a pressure of her hand and an old uncle's kiss. But no word was spoken on the subject.

I had a final cigar with the curate, and another with the schoolmaster ; bade them and their wives good-bye ; told them all would come right if we only had patience, and then went to Harry. But he was in the country, and I thought I should not see him again.

With the assistance of good Beeves, I got my portmanteau packed that night. I was going to start about ten o'clock next morning. It was long before I got to sleep, and I heard the step of the colonel, whose room was below mine on the drawing-room floor, going up and down, up and down, all the time, till slumber came at last, and muffled me up.—We met at breakfast, a party lugubrious enough. Beeves waited like a mute ; the colonel ate his breakfast like an offended parent ; Adela trifled with hers like one who had other things to think about ; and I ate mine like a parting guest who was being anything but sped. When the post-bag was brought in, the colonel unlocked it mechanically ; distributed the letters ; opened one with indifference, read a few lines, and with a groan fell back in his chair. We started up, and laid him on the sofa. With a privilege of an old friend, I glanced at the letter, and found that a certain speculation in which the colonel had ventured largely, had utterly failed. I told Adela enough to satisfy her as to the nature of the misfortune. We feared apoplexy, but before we could send for any medical man, he opened his eyes, and called Adela. He clasped her to his bosom, and then tried to rise ; but fell back helpless.

“ Shall we send for Dr. Wade ? ” said Adela, trembling and pale as death.

"Dr. Wade!" faltered the old man, with a perceptible accent of scorn.

"Which shall we send for?" I said.

"How can you ask?" he answered, feebly. "Harry Armstrong, of course."

The blood rushed into Adela's white face, and Beeves rushed out of the room. In a quarter of an hour, Harry was with us. Adela had retired. He made a few inquiries, administered some medicine he had brought with him, and, giving orders that he should not be disturbed for a couple of hours, left him with the injunction to keep perfectly quiet.

"Take my traps up to my room again, Beeves; and tell the coachman he won't be wanted this morning."

"Thank you, sir," said Beeves. "I don't know what we should do without you, sir."

When Harry returned, we carried the colonel up to his own room, and Beeves got him to bed. I said something about a nurse, but Harry said there was no one so fit to nurse him as Adela. The poor man had never been ill before; and I dare say he would have been very rebellious, had he not had a great trouble at his heart to quiet him. He was as submissive as could be desired.

I felt sure he would be better as soon as he had told Adela. I gave Harry a hint of the matter, and he looked very much as if he would shout "Oh, jolly!" but he did not.

Towards the evening, the colonel called his daughter to his bedside, and said,—

"Addie, darling, I have hurt you dreadfully."

"Oh, no! dear papa; you have not. And it is so easy to put it all right, you know," she added, turning her head away a little.

"No, my child," he said in a tone full of self-reproach, "nobody can put it right. I have made us both beggars, Addie, my love."

"Well, dearest papa, you can bear a little poverty, surely?"

"It's not of myself I am thinking, my darling. Don't do me that injustice, or I shall behave like a fool. It's only you I am thinking of."

"Oh, is that all, papa? Do you know that, if it were not for your sake, I could sing a song about it!"

"Ah! you don't know what you make so light of. Poverty is not so easy to endure."

"Papa," said Adela, solemnly, "if you knew how awful things looked to me a little while ago—but it's all gone now!—the whole earth black and frozen to the heart, with no God in it, and nothing worth living for—you would not wonder that I take the prospect of poverty with absolute indifference—yes, if you will believe me, with something of a strange excitement. There will be something to battle with and beat."

And she stretched out a strong, beautiful white arm—from which the loose open sleeve fell back, as if with that weapon of might she would strike poverty to the earth; but it was only to adjust the pillow, which had slipped sideways from the loved head.

"But Mr. Armstrong will not want to marry you now, Addie."

"Oh, won't he?" thought Adela; or at least I think she thought so. But she said, rather demurely, and very shyly:

"But that won't be any worse than it was before; for you know you would never have let me marry him anyhow."

"Oh! yes, I would, in time, Adela. I am not such a brute as you take me for."

"Oh! you dear darling papa!" cried the poor child, and burst into tears, with her head on her father's bosom. And he began comforting her so sweetly, that you would have thought she had lost everything, and he was going to give her all back again.

"Papa! papa!" she cried, "I will work for you; I will be

your servant ; I will love you and love you to all eternity. I won't leave you. I won't indeed. What *does* it matter for the money !”

At this moment the doctor entered.

“ Ah !” he said, “ this won't do at all. I thought you would have made a better nurse, Miss Adela. There you are, both crying together !”

“ Indeed, Mr. Henry,” said Adela, rather comically, “ it's not my fault. He would cry.”

And as she spoke she wiped away her own tears.

“ But he's looking much better, after all,” said Harry. “ Allow me to feel your pulse.”

The patient was pronounced much better ; fresh orders were given ; and Harry took his leave.

But Adela felt vexed. She did not consider that he knew nothing of what had passed between her father and her. To the warm fireside of her knowledge, he came in wintry and cold. Of course it would never do for the doctor to aggravate his patient's symptoms by making love to his daughter ; but ought he not to have seen that it was all right between them now ?—How often we feel and act as if our mood were the atmosphere of the world ! It may be a cold frost within us, when our friend is in the glow of a summer sunset : and we call him unsympathetic and unfeeling. If we let him know the state of our world, we should see the rose-hues fade from his, and our friend put off his singing robes, and sit down with us in sackcloth and ashes, to share our temptation and grief.

“ You see I cannot offer you to him now, Adela,” said her father.

“ No, papa.”

But I knew that all had come right, although I saw from Adela's manner that she was not happy about it.

So things went on for a week, during which the colonel was

slowly mending. I used to read him to sleep. Adela would sit by the fire, or by the bedside, and go and come while I was reading.

One afternoon, in the twilight, Harry entered. We greeted; and then, turning to the bed, I discovered that my friend was asleep. We drew towards the fire, and sat down. Adela had gone out of the room a few minutes before.

"He is such a manageable patient!" I said.

"Noble old fellow!" returned the doctor. "I wish he would like me, and then all would be well."

"He doesn't dislike you personally," I said.

"I hope not. I can understand his displeasure perfectly, and repugnance too. But I assure you, Mr. Smith, I did not lay myself out to gain her affections. I was caught myself before I knew. And I believe she liked me too before she knew."

"I fear their means will be very limited after this."

"For his sake I am very sorry to hear it; but for my own, I cannot help thinking it the luckiest thing that could have happened."

"I am not so sure of that. It might increase the difficulty."

At this moment I thought I heard the handle of the door move, but there was a screen between us and it. I went on.

"That is, if you still want to marry her, you know."

"Marry her!" he said. "If she were a beggar-maid, I would be proud as King Cophetua to marry her to-morrow."

There was a rustle in the twilight, and a motion of its gloom. With a quick gliding, Adela drew near, knelt beside Harry, and hid her eyes on his knee. I thought it better to go.

Was this unmaidenly of her?

I say "No, for she knew that he loved her."

As I left the room, I heard the colonel call—

"Adela."

And when I returned, I found them both standing by the bedside, and the old man holding a hand of each.

“Now, John Smith,” I said to myself, “you may go when you please.”

Before we, that is, I and my reader, part, however, my reader may be inclined to address me thus :

“Pray, Mr. Smith, do you think it was your wonderful prescription of story-telling, that wrought Miss Cathcart’s cure?”

“How can I tell?” I answer. “Probably it had its share. But there were other things to take into account. If you went on to ask me whether it was not Harry’s prescriptions ; or whether it was not the curate’s sermons ; or whether it was not her falling in love with the doctor ; or whether even her father’s illness and the loss of their property had not something to do with it ; or whether it was not the doctor’s falling in love with her ; or that the cold weather suited her ; I should reply in the same way to every one of the interrogatories.”

But I retort another question :

“Did you ever know anything whatever resulting from the operation of one separable cause?”

In regard to any good attempt I have ever made in my life, I am content to know that the end has been gained. Whether I have succeeded or not is of no consequence, if I have tried well.—In the present case, Adela recovered ; and my own conviction is, that the cure was effected mainly from within. Except in physics, we can put nothing to the *experimentum crucis*, and must be content with conjecture and probability.

The night before I left, I had a strange dream. I stood in a lonely cemetery in a pine-forest. Dark trees that never shed their foliage rose all around—strange trees that mourn for ever, because they never die. The dreamlight that has no visible source, because it is in the soul that dreams, showed all in a

dim blue-grey dawn, that never grew clearer. The night wind was the only power abroad save myself. It went with slow intermitting, sigh-like gusts, through the tops of the dreaming trees ; for the trees seemed, in the midst of my dream, to have dreams of their own.

Now this burial-place was mine. I had tended it for years. In it lay all the men and women whom I had honoured and loved.

And I was a great sculptor. And over every grave I had placed a marble altar, and upon every altar the marble bust of the man or woman who lay beneath ; each in the supreme beauty which all the defects of birth and of time and of incompleteness, could not hide from the eye of the prophetic sculptor.

Each was like a half-risen glorified form of the being who had there descended into the realms of Hades. And through these glimmering rows of the dead I walked in the dream-light ; and from one to another I went in the glory of having known and loved them ; now weeping sad tears over the loss of the beautiful ; now rejoicing in the strength of the mighty ; now exulting in the love and truth which would yet dawn upon me when I too should go down beneath the visible, and emerge in the realms of the actual and the unseen ? All the time I was sensible of a wondrous elevation of being, a glory of life and feeling hitherto unknown to me.

I had entered the secret places of my own hidden world by the gate of sleep, and walked about them in my dream.

Gradually I became aware that a foreign sound was mingling with the sighing of the tree-tops overhead. It grew and grew, till I recognized the sound of wheels—not of heavenly chariots, but of earthly motion and business. I heard them stop at the lofty gates of my holy place, and by twos and threes, or in solitary singleness, came people into my garden of the dead. And who should they be but the buried ones?—all those

whose marble busts stood in ghostly silence, within the shadows of the everlasting pines? And they talked and laughed and jested. And my city of the dead melted away. And lo! we stood in the midst of a great market-place; and I knew it to be the market-place in which the children had sat who said to the other children:

“We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.”

And to my misery, I saw that the faces of my fathers and brothers, my mothers and sisters, had not grown nobler in the country of the dead, in which I had thought them safe and shining. Cares, as of this world, had so settled upon them, that I could hardly recognize the old likeness; and the dim forms of the ideal glory which I had reproduced in my marble busts, had vanished altogether. Ah me! my world of the dead! my city of treasures, hid away under the locks and bars of the unchangeable! Was there then no world of realities?—only a Vanity Fair after all? The glorious women went sweeping about, smiling and talking, and buying and adorning, but they were glorious no longer; for they had common thoughts, and common beauties, and common language and aims and hopes; and everything was common about them. And ever and anon, with a kind of shiver, as if to keep alive my misery by the sight of my own dreams, the marble busts would glimmer out, faintly visible amidst the fair, as if about to re-appear, and, dispossessing the vacuity of folly, assert the noble and the true, and give me back my dead to love and worship once more, in the loneliness of the pine-forest. Side by side with a greedy human face, would shimmer out for a moment the ghostly marble face; and the contrast all but drove me mad with perplexity and misery.

“Alas!” I cried, “where is my future? Where is my beautiful death?”

All at once I saw the face of a man who went round and round the skirts of the market and looked earnestly in amongst the busy idlers. He was head and shoulders taller than any there ; and his face was a pale face, with an infinite future in it, visible in all its grief. I made my way through the crowd, which regarded me with a look which I could not understand, and came to the stranger. I threw myself at his feet and sobbed : “ I have lost them all. I will follow thee.” He took me by the hand, and led me back. We walked up and down the fair together. And as we walked, the tumult lessened, and lessened. They made a path for us to go, and all eyes were turned upon my guide. The tumult sank, and all was still. Men and women stood in silent rows. My guide looked upon them all, on the right and on the left. And they all looked on him till their eyes filled with tears. And the old faces of my friends grew slowly out of the worldly faces, until at length they were such as I had known of yore.

Suddenly they all fell upon their knees, and their faces changed into the likeness of my marble faces. Then my guide waved his hand—and lo ! we were in the midst of my garden of the dead ; and the wind was like the sound of a going in the tops of the pine-trees ; and my white marbles glimmered glorified on the altars of the tombs. And the dream vanished, and I came awake.

And I will not say here whose face the face of my guide was like.

THE END.

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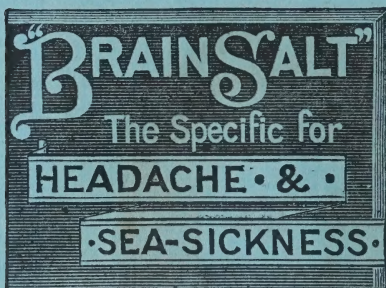
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